Lilith

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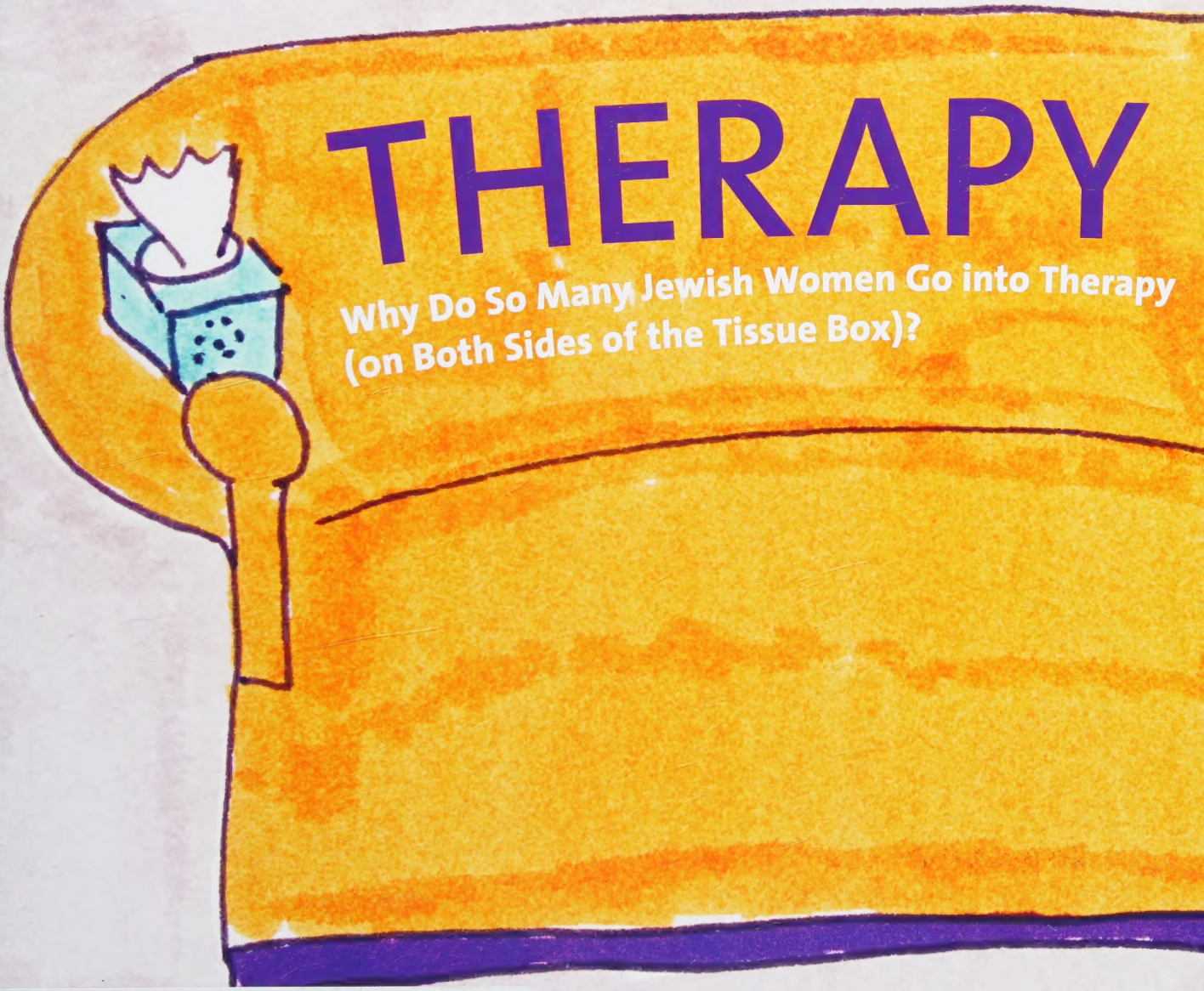

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Lilith

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"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."
—Nessa Rapoport

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Eighteen years ago my younger daughter celebrated her bat mitzvah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem with the Women of the Wall. The Thursday morning Torah reading, held in the space near the Wall known as Robinson's Arch, followed the soft-spoken women-only morning prayer service held at the Wall itself. Some prayed in a tallit, and one young woman was garbed like a male yeshiva student: black pants, white shirt, cropped hair under a black kippah, sidelocks. We elicited a few sidelong glances from others praying individually on our side of the mechitza that divides the Western Wall plaza by gender. But there was no overt hostility, and certainly no legal action against us "nonconforming" females.

Things have gotten worse. Today, a bat mitzvah celebration like that might put us all at risk. Jerusalem police are enforcing stringent rulings limiting women's full participation in prayer at the Wall, and the rules against mixed-gender prayer still hold. Anat Hoffman, director of the Israel Religious Action Center, was recently handcuffed and arrested for praying with a tallit at the Wall. Bonna Devora Haberman, a founder of Women of the Wall, was forbidden—by the police—from carrying her tallit and tefillin into the women's section.

It has been a rough few years. Municipal transit has forced women to the back of the bus in ultra-religious neighborhoods, where advertising posters showing women's faces have painted over by "modesty" patrols. This is a refinement of the usual haredi harassment of women and girls for their choice of clothing. If these extreme acts didn't represent such a confiscation of women's rights we could appreciate their nutty, comic-opera quality. But this is no joke, no parody, no exaggeration. We've got the makings here of a war on women.

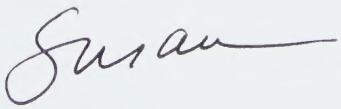
The most recent news from Israel came to me while I was mulling over the differences between two books focused on women creating ritual in Jerusalem. *A Weave of Women* is Esther Broner's 1978 novel about a small group of women facing birth, death, illness, abuse, misogyny, healing. Fast forward to the similar themes in *One Hundred Philistine Foreskins*, the new novel by Tova Reich due out early in 2013. While Broner's small cadre of women trying to bring feminism into Judaism is often under attack, Reich, 35 years later, can create a powerful, learned woman with the resources to attract many hundreds of followers. Ima Temima is the beacon for an all-female School for Prophets; she's a fearless and charismatic healer who attracts even ultra-Orthodox (male) rabbis for a blessing, a learned judgment or a sermon (which they hear from a men's balcony).

You might imagine that the idea of a woman in power in Jerusalem—a woman viewed by some as the Messiah—represents a huge change from the political helplessness of the smart and spiritual women in Broner's novel. But while Tova Reich's protagonist cites with sarcasm and wit the myriad references to women in Jewish sacred texts as mere "vessels," she nonetheless bears a child by a patriarchal, polygamous cult leader who demands all attention be lavished upon *him* whenever one of his wives gives birth; he screams out in the throes of his "childbirth"—stealing from the birthing mother the primacy of her role even in that quintessentially female experience. Reminders of a woman's chronic struggle against an essential powerlessness are present on almost every page.

So how are real-life women sustained in our struggle for equal access and equal value in Judaism, all these years after Broner's novel and Lilith's launch? When will we, like the Children of Israel crossing the desert from slavery to freedom, reach new political terrain? What will it take to get us there?

If these extreme acts didn't represent such a confiscation of women's rights we could appreciate their nutty, comic-opera quality. But this is no joke, no parody.

Some change takes place incrementally, slowly, like the ordination of women as rabbis. And some change takes place after a visionary enunciates a manifesto for making things better in original ways, though you know that innovative ideas aren't scarce. It's the ability to stay connected, to sustain the energy required to make promising ideas into long-term realities that's hard. There's push-back, resistance; people in power do not give it up easily. Moving from the dream to the reality requires hard work and focus. Stunningly, though, change can also come speedily after circumstances become utterly intolerable. The lives lost in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911 spurred desperately needed occupational safety laws. The massacre of schoolchildren in Connecticut is forcing legislators to address gun control. One cannot compare loss of life with a loss of freedom to pray at the Western Wall. Nonetheless, the repulsion that so many Jews in Israel and the Diaspora feel over restrictions of women's rights and the rights of non-Orthodox Jews could be the engine driving power out of the hands of the ultra-Orthodox. Maybe the alarming actions of the authorities over women's prayers at the Western Wall are a necessary precursor to our finally achieving equality and religious freedoms. The women who will use that power won't only be fictional heroines.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN

Judaism's "modesty" texts amount to pornography.

Why reduce a woman to her breasts?

Sexual assault and harassment are realities on campus.

The home is not feudal. *Restaurants* are feudal.

I'm an artist who's Jewish and a feminist, but I am an artist first.

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

Martha Rosler's Greatest Garage Sale *Ever*

Martha Rosler, the multimedia performance artist, has been staging garage sales in art-gallery settings since the 1970s. And if you have ever watched her brandishing a knife or a rolling pin in "Semiotics of the Kitchen," her classic, gallery-worthy six-minute feminist video from 1975, you know that she makes brilliant art out of the commonplace.

This November, Rosler's "Meta-Monumental Garage Sale" installation had a 13-day run at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Visitors were simultaneously in an actual garage sale (the objects on display were all tagged, and you could acquire just about everything but the display tables) and inside a piece of performance art. At MoMA, Rosler meticulously displayed objects ranging from underwear and a decades-old "sanitary napkin" belt to a Mercedes-Benz automobile missing its engine. She was present daily at the garage sale, to interact with attendees and to talk about the role of commodities in contemporary life. "We all start very early desiring objects" said Rosler. Although the critique is never heavy handed—the garage sale is too much fun for that—Rosler did reference philosopher **Herbert Marcuse** at the MoMA press preview and talked about "the affective relationship between seller and buyer—even though it's a transaction." The artist understands that, as she puts it, "We fetishize commodities. Objects have more vibrant lives than the people who produce them."

The humble nature of most garage-sale items, and the intimate glance into the seller's life that these objects provide, really invite a feminist analysis. "The garage sale typically was where women could step out of the domestic space and move onto the lawn—a liminal space. Women can recoup value" from the items they're willing to discard. Of course garage sales are not everyone's teacup. "I'm a kid from Brooklyn," she said. "I live in Brooklyn. I don't know from 'consignment'. Turns out that's how the high end disposes of things—not at a garage sale."

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

I realized that 15 years had passed since I released my first tambourine design. Regrettably, one big thing remains unchanged: women are still not permitted to read *Torah* in plain sight of the *Kotel*.

BETSY PLATKIN TEUTSCH at *ritualwell.org*, talking about her much-beloved "Thanks for the Chair!" tambourines

Resistant to All Things Pink

Though I've never had breast cancer, I think it's fair to say the disease has shaped my life. My mother [**Paula Hyman**] was diagnosed at age 32, when I was 5 years old; she battled the disease for 33 years before dying of her sixth recurrence last December. Four years ago, I learned that I carry the BRCA genetic mutation, and I chose to have two prophylactic surgeries—bilateral mastectomy and the removal of my ovaries and fallopian tubes—taking drastic action in order to reduce my risk of breast cancer and ovarian cancer.

So one might think I'd spend the month of October festooned with pink ribbons, buying up pink products, marching through the streets in a "Save the Ta-Tas" t-shirt, to raise awareness of this disease that has haunted me for nearly 35 years. But the truth is: I'm emphatically pink-resistant.

"Awareness" is...well, it's certainly better than ignorance. But it's so abstract. What kind of awareness does this month really spark? Awareness that women get sick and sometimes lose their breasts? Awareness of breast cancer's environmental causes? Awareness of the political, racial, and economic inequities that are part of this disease and its treatment?

Some people argue that the few cents that might go to breast cancer research when you purchase a pink product are better than nothing. But I wonder how to measure the cost of this kind of corporate-driven and consumer-oriented pinkwashing. If we think we're helping the cause by "shopping for the cure," does that distract our attention from other political actions we could be taking?

And as someone who grew up with a one-breasted mother and voluntarily gave up my own "ta-tas" to avoid breast cancer, I'm put off by the objectifying humor of much of current breast cancer advocacy. I'm all for playfulness, and I know I'll be labeled a humorless feminist for saying this, but is it really worth capitalizing on the sexual objectification of women to attract support for this disease? Why reduce a woman to her breasts, especially when she might be about to lose them?

JUDITH ROSENBAUM from *rolereboot.org*, October 29, 2012

Sweeping It Under the Rug at Amherst

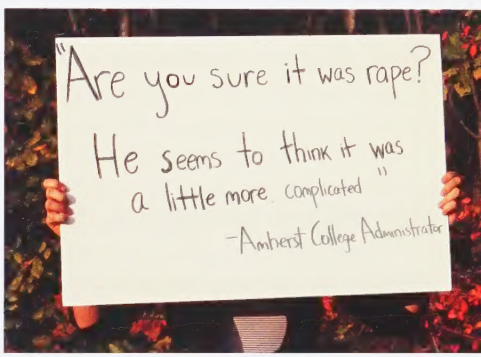


PHOTO: JISOO LEE, AMHERST COLLEGE, '13

In Leviticus 19:16 we read *lo ta'amod al dam rei-acha*, "do not stand idly by while your neighbor bleeds." And yet, for far too long on college campuses across the country, students have stood idle. Sexual assault and harassment are realities of belonging to a campus community. The act of forcing not consensual sexual activity on another person is a crime, punishable by imprisonment within the legal system. While the legal system can be used to pursue justice in cases of sexual assault, many victims of assault need to turn to college policy for their safety, because their cases do not have the physical or eye-witness proof necessary to be upheld in a court of law. The college policy then often acts as the only mechanism of defense and security for survivors of sexual assault. Yet, friends have looked the other way at parties, college administrations have consistently mismanaged disciplinary hearings on sexual violence, and counseling centers have been ill equipped to handle survivors of assault. This past spring, an off-campus Amherst College fraternity printed and distributed a t-shirt on campus that portrayed a woman being burned and roasted on a spit with the phrase "Roasting Fat Ones Since 1847" lettered above it. This past summer, a boy who had been assaulted on campus killed himself.

This semester at Amherst College, we decided to take action. We refused to stand idle as we watched our neighbors, our friends and our classmates, bleed in an uncaring climate and without the resources they needed to be safe and respected.

AC Voice, the Amherst College culture blog of which I am the editor, published an article first about the offensive t-shirt and then subsequently a photo exhibition of responses to assault that survivors received from the community. The campus newspaper printed one survivor's terrifying testimonial of the administration's woeful mishandling of her case. The articles went viral. In lines in the cafeteria, discussions in class, and co-curricular activities, sexual assault became the sole topic of discussion.

The college president, **Biddy Martin**, invited ten students, myself included, to present to the Board of Trustees a list of proposed changes to college policy, the allocation of resources in student life, and training for the Amherst community. President Martin has since taken our suggestions and made strides to accomplish each one. This past Friday, all classes were cancelled for a Day of Dialogue in which students met in small groups to discuss what "enthusiastic consent" was and how to best end the culture of silence in the face of sexual violence at Amherst. The New York Times published an article about President Martin's immediate and efficient response to student outrage in the face of a newly vitalized awareness about the suffering of sexual assault survivors within the Amherst College community.

We are learning now what it means as a campus community to be more than idle, to do more than watch passively as our classmates feel themselves unsafe while out at night, as our friends go through a flawed and confusing disciplinary hearing process after being assaulted, as they seek emotional support. We hope that if we learn to stand actively and attentively, armed with education and understanding, by our neighbor, our classmate, our friends, they will not have to be traumatized or endure the suffering that assault entails. We hope that if we stand together as a student body then our neighbor will not bleed.

LIYA RECHTMAN

"Bless this prayer group..."

May it be Your will, our God and God of our mothers and fathers, to bless this prayer group and all who pray within it: them, their families and all that is theirs, together with all the women and girls of your people Israel. Strengthen us and direct our hearts to serve You in truth, reverence and love. May our prayer be desirable and acceptable to You like the prayers of our holy mothers, Sarah, Rivka, Rahel and Leah. May our song ascend to Your Glorious Throne in holiness and purity, like the songs of Miriam the Prophet, Devorah the Judge, and Hannah in Shilo, and may it be pleasing to you as a sweet savor and fine incense.

And for our sisters, all the women and girls of your people Israel: let us merit to see their joy and hear their voices raised before You in song and praise. May no woman or girl be silenced ever again among Your people Israel or in all the world. God of justice, let us merit to see justice and salvation soon, for the sanctification of Your name and the repair of Your world, as it is written: Zion will hear and be glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, over Your judgments, O God. And it is written: For Zion's sake I will not be still and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be silent, until her righteousness shines forth like a great light and her salvation like a flaming torch.

For Torah shall go forth from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem. Amen, selah.

RAHEL SHARON JASKOW, written for Women of the Wall, *womenofthewall.org.il*

Zvia Margaliot reserves her musical performances for all-female audiences. However, she has no problem performing poetry in front of male and females alike. She says, "I go according to the *halakhah* and there is no prohibition against spoken word, so why not?"

From "Israeli Slam-Poetry's Orthodox Matriarch" in Tablet magazine, December 4, 2012.

Healthy, Simple & Stylish

Perhaps she is the answer to Julia Child. Where Julia dictated that each step of her marvelously complicated recipes must be followed to a T, or to a peeled pearl onion, **Helen Nash**, the accomplished home cook whose books are credited with bringing variety and panache to kosher cooking, says, "I really, really, really respect women. The home is not feudal. *Restaurants* are feudal." And what she means is that, like many things in Jewish practice, in fact, there are several possible means to an end. Helen Nash herself would use a blender to create the perfect texture in her deliciously seasoned soup. But she gets it that a time-pressed cook striving for the same effect is likelier to use a wand to puree the vegetables rather than to shlep out the blender.

While there is nothing dictatorial about Helen Nash's approach to food, there are certainly principles underlying what she cooks. Her new book, *Helen Nash's New Kosher Cuisine: Healthy, Simple & Stylish* (Overlook Press), has recipes that are both elegant and innovative. And she understands the process of feeding self and family. Helen Nash and her family suffered terrible losses and deprivation during the Holocaust, so her beautiful table settings, artfully and mindfully prepared meals, and enduring Shabbat traditions can be seen as a defiance of what the world might have expected of her after the war.

Preparing home-cooked meals for her ailing husband in the five years before his death in 2008, she made sure that kosher laws were observed strictly. But she also overturned many kosher cooking stereotypes. This book features low-fat recipes using a cornucopia of vegetables, not overcooked green beans, boiled potatoes and the giant slabs of shoe-leather beef of Ashkenazi meal mythology. Over slivered mango, ginger tea and irresistible rugelach in her Manhattan apartment, Nash spoke about the new cookbook, her third. "I'm selling a way of life every day. For example, small portions. I would say four ounces of protein, for myself, but I know that most cooks will do at least six. And the quality of ingredients is important for flavor when you are not using fat."

Quality doesn't always come simply. Nash sometimes calls Chicago for the proper ground poppyseeds. And though she lives on the Upper East Side, she walks across Central Park to the West Side to buy her produce at Fairway market, where, if she isn't sure about the spaghetti squash, she'll buy two, hedging her bets.

When she was first refining her own cooking, being a foodie was not as democratic as it is today, and dedicated food fans had to find teachers and mentors. Married and a mother, and living in New York, she took cooking classes from renowned chefs Lydie Marshall and Michael Field. Some of her teachers even invited her to bring in her own kosher utensils and cooking pots to class so that she could taste what she was preparing.

Like Julia, Helen Nash has been a role model for younger women. Today's star chefs also appreciate her. Jean-Georges Vongerichten, a high priest of New York restaurant cuisine, calls Nash's recipes "Exciting, sophisticated and modern."

S.W.S.

From London with Passion...

Tiny diamond in nose, big brown eyes, bright red lipstick, a bowler hat or more traditional turban playing on Orthodox-married-woman-hair-covered modesty, **Jacqueline Nicholls** could well be London's explosively creative gift to Jewish Orthodox feminism.

New Yorkers were lucky to have "Jacqueline Nicholls: New Work" on view at the JCC in Manhattan's Laurie M. Tisch Gallery for two months ending Nov. 1. (You can catch the entire show on Nicholls' website, *jacquelinenicholls.com*—*The Kittel Collection*, an exploration of clothing in Jewish tradition; Ghosts & Shadows: The Women Who Haunt the Talmud; and Gather the Broken, a series of drawings counting the Omer, the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot.)

In 2010, Nicholls' *The Ladies Guild Collection* of dirty doily paper-cuts was shown at the JOFA (Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance) conference in New York. Words of rabbinic misogyny are painstakingly cut out in Hebrew and/or English (see paper-cut in Lilith's fall 2011 issue) on what look like paper doilies with sexualized images of women. With training in architecture and work in medical illustration, Nicholls' transgressive doilies reference the Orthodox synagogue of her childhood, where the main job of the Ladies' Guild (the sisterhood) was to serve refreshments.

Look closely at the texts and be shocked, outraged. Jewish men said *that?! How dare they.*

Nicholls' work from the past two years is subtler, literally more layered. *The Kittel Collection*—clothing cut with haute couture skill and creativity (previewed in early 2012 on "The Sisterhood" blog at the Forward)— is based on the white garment worn by a traditional Jewish male at his wedding, when leading a seder, and on other ritual occasions. The most potent of Nicholls' garments is the modesty (*tzniut*) kittel. The arms are knotted together like a straight jacket. Subtle enough to be overlooked is the white-on-white embroidery of pornographic figures. Nicholls' message: Judaism's *tzniut* texts amount to pornography—instruction books dissecting women, body part by body part, insulting to both women and men.

Ghosts & Shadows comes across as skillful, scholarly, subtle with layers of gauze fabric revealing glimpses of nameless women under the embroidered top layer with Talmudic text. Nicholls explains: "Whether or not these women ever existed, what's interesting is that it's the women characters who are the catalyst for change, ... subverting male rabbinic thinking." But at least for this viewer, these gauzy glimpses lack the visual potency of her paper-cuts.

The most intriguing among the Ghosts & Shadows is "Shmuel's Daughters." They admitted to having been kidnapped but testified to the male authorities that they were not sexually compromised, and so were allowed to marry. Nicholls' take on the tale: Even more important than whether or not they had been violated, thanks to their testimony they were able to get on with their lives. As the daughters of a scholar, they knew how to play the game.

Nicholls may be ready to move on from her earlier work, but the paper-cuts won't take a back seat. In her words: "I keep thinking I'm finished with the paper-cuts, but then events conspire in the Jewish world."

When **Anat Hoffman** was arrested at Jerusalem's Western Wall for saying the Sh'ma prayer, Nicholls felt compelled to return to her paper-cut of a woman with her mouth cut out. She featured the image in her October blog (*http://jacquelinenicholls.blogspot.com*).

Forget simplistic positions on Jewish women speaking out. Nicholls admits that she'd like to silence the women desperately competing for "Jewish Mum of the Year" on British reality TV "at its worst." Loud, crude, an embarrassment. And she'd like to get the ultra-Orthodox U.K. women who have been coerced into improper sexual activities to speak out. As Nicholls says on her blog, "This is about Jewish women finding their voices, speaking up, protesting our dismay and anger at how women are being treated." She's currently at work on a new paper-cut about women's voices.

AMY STONE

Although no one challenged her "in an official way," **Madeleine Albright** recalls encountering subtle gender bias. "Once, I was talking about some particular issue, and I said, 'I feel like we need to do something.' A couple of men looked at me and said, 'Feel, what do you mean, you feel?' They were making fun of that. Then I was having a meeting with a woman who was the foreign minister of Finland, and she's sitting across the table from me and said, 'I really feel like we need to deal with it that way,' and the men on my side, you could see, they gave each other a look like, 'Oh my God, what's going on here?'"

CAITLIN YOSHIKO KANDIL from Moment Magazine's "The Madeleine Effect," November 1, 2012

The Bronfman Haggadah

A petite woman with a penchant to surprise you, artist **Jan Aronson** has an unconventional streak that's immediately apparent. A bolt of bright red is woven into the auburn locks framing her face, Susan Sontag-like. "The color is called 'Cherry Bomb'," she confides.

Aronson's bold use of color is apparent throughout the original, imaginative illustrations she has made for *The Bronfman Haggadah*, a new book she has co-created with her husband, philanthropist **Edgar M. Bronfman**. Together for 24 years, and married for 19, this book marks the first time she and her husband have worked together. He wrote the text, she handled the illustrations. They employ design motifs from Egyptian, Greek, Roman and African cultures, as well as images not usually found in the guide to the seder: biblical maps, feathers as symbols of flight and freedom, vividly detailed mosquitoes and frogs. Among the most striking: a tiny basket carrying baby Moses virtually lost in the vast, lush landscape of the Nile. "I like the things you don't expect," she explains. "As an illustrator you want to challenge the imagination and surprise people."

Born into a Jewish family in New Orleans, Aronson had spent most of her career as a painter, but had never before ventured into illustration. The branching out has been a reinvention that inspired her as an artist. "The whole experience caused me to evolve at an interesting time in my life. At 63 you're not mid-career, not emerging, but there are still places to go which is very encouraging to me. As a human being, as an artist, change and growth are always possible—you can do it any time."

Another inspiration for the Haggadah are the secular Jewish views she and her husband share. While the couple might have different styles—"I'm an outdoor dog, he's an indoor dog," she lovingly jokes—together they have created a Jewish life for themselves that is filled with meaning, without relying on traditional Jewish religious interpretations. That innovative thinking is apparent throughout *The Bronfman Haggadah*. It differs from the traditional seder guide in several ways. For example, the cup of Elijah and the welcoming of strangers are done at the beginning of the evening, even before lighting the candles, not near the end. According to Aronson, the logic is apparent. "If the seder is teaching children about welcoming strangers and extending kindness, this should be a focus early on in the experience."

Such creative thinking is not new to her. "I'm an artist who's Jewish and a feminist, but I am an artist first," Aronson explains. The seder too is an art form for both Aronson and Bronfman, who see it as a unique opportunity in Jewish life not only to share the fun of gathering family, to experience ritual and to learn the Passover story, but also a chance for a deeper conversation that explores values, philosophies and meaning. "True conversation is really an art," observes Aronson. "It should flow, change and evolve. That's how you find your way to new thinking." She hopes that *The Bronfman Haggadah* (Rizzoli, $29.95) will facilitate just such a thought-provoking experience at Passover meals.

Aronson's illustrations will be featured in an exhibit at the Hebrew Union College in New York in 2013.
www.bronfmanhaggadah.com

RUTH ANDREW ELLENSON

I always knew I was lucky to be a girl. We were never beaten up. We never felt the sting of the belt on our backs, or the ringing slap of the teacher's hand. Girls never came home from school with purple welts. We never felt the stick coming down on our heads. We were treated gently; less was expected from us.

A girl is not meant to be a scholar. A girl cannot hope to learn Torah like a man. Only boys obey the holiest of God's commandments and study the secrets of the Book.

It has been this way for generations: Men mold boys with sticks, searing the words of God into their minds. Of course, not every teacher hit, and not every boy felt the harsh slam of the rebbe's palm. Only the bad ones did—those who misbehaved or didn't study.

JUDY BROWN (who wrote the novel *Hush*, about the denial of abuse in the ultra-Orthodox world, under the pseudonym Eishes Chayil) at the *Forward.com*, December 6, 2012.

Naming It: Reproductive Justice

Lilith's coverage has noted that Jewish women, historically at the forefront of the battles for women's reproductive health, including abortion rights and access to contraception, have not been as visible as once we were.

Perhaps that's because for many Jewish women in their reproductive years the biggest worry is whether they will be able to get pregnant, not (as it was in the pre-Roe era) the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. Yet Jewish women's organizations, even those who were once shy about taking a stance in favor of a woman's right to choose when and how she would bear children, still march shoulder to shoulder with other groups in favor of protecting this hard-won legal right to reproductive choice.

Now, National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), arguably the most progressive of the panoply of Jewish women's organizations that once defined North American Jewish women's identity, is looking beyond the matter of ensuring that laws on the books are defended. NCJW's C.E.O. ***Nancy Kaufman*** *puts forth the energizing notion that, 40 years after the passage of the landmark legislation intended to make abortion safe and legal, we need to reframe reproductive rights as a matter of reproductive justice.*

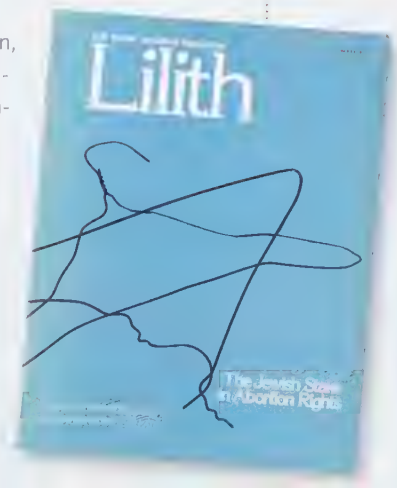
"The 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* in January 2013 is a time when we rightly celebrate the survival of the U.S. Supreme Court court decision that affirmed the right of every woman to control her own body. The ruling came in an era when great strides in advancing the civil rights of African Americans, women, and ethnic and religious minorities set the tone for political discourse."

"But subsequent court decisions have whittled away at the ruling in *Roe* characterized by Justice Blackmun as 'a step that had to be taken as we go down the road toward the full emancipation of women'. It is clear now that the struggle for reproductive rights is hardly over. An onslaught of state laws has made access to abortion ever more difficult. Restrictions on federal insurance coverage excluded abortion from the range of health care to which every woman should be entitled. And the fact that women's religious liberty and freedom of conscience are also at stake gets lost in the debates over whether fetuses should be made legal persons and how wide the corridor of an abortion clinic needs to be.

"As we watch abortion opponents move on to attack even access to contraception, saving *Roe* means moving from the idea of reproductive freedom to the broader concept of reproductive justice. The way to save *Roe* and what it signifies is not to simply take our stand behind an edifice of mere legal rights, laboriously argued case by case, but to assert a vision of freedom for all women that encompasses true autonomy and equality. Many factors complicate a woman's access to abortion or birth control: geographic isolation, age, lack of information and education, and discrimination based on color, national origin, language, immigration status, and religion. These complicating factors cannot be separated from a woman's legal right to reproductive health.

"The *Roe* anniversary offers an opportunity to rededicate Jewish women to an approach to abortion rights that places it firmly in the context of the needs of all women, however disadvantaged they may be by laws, policies, programs, prejudice, and circumstances."

S.W.S.



Rape and the Holocaust

Sexual Violence against Jewish Women During the Holocaust, a 2010 book co-edited by **Rochelle Saidel**, has been in the forefront of the effort to bring this subject to wider attention. Perhaps recent publicity from **Eve Ensler**, **Gloria Steinem** and others about widespread rape linked to genocide in Africa has also helped historians recognize and ask about similar violence against Jewish women seven decades ago. At a USC Shoah Foundation symposium in November organized by Saidel, **Jane Fonda** read aloud a Jewish girl's recollection of her rape while in hiding from the Nazis, from the book *And the Rat Laughed*, by Israeli novelist **Nava Semel**.

The Shoah Foundation reported that, following the symposium's screening of oral histories by women, a man in the audience suggested the faces of the sexually abused women be hidden from the camera, because of Jewish laws of modesty. **Eva Fogelman**, a psychologist and symposium participant who has worked extensively with Holocaust survivors and their children, replied that "The victims of sexual violence during the Holocaust must be seen and heard and not be compromised by modesty. It is the perpetrators that should be ashamed and not the women who were sexually violated. The witnesses of sexual violence who have been silent for so long, for fear of blaming the victim and shame that they will be 'tainted goods', are speaking out at last."

"...and through the music to arouse in the viewer the profound emotions depicted in the film across a gulf of sensibility and time."

Violinist **Alicia Svigals** on the original score she has created to accompany the 1918 silent movie The Yellow Ticket starring Pola Negri. Excerpts featuring Svigals' score can be viewed here: *http://vimeo.com/43635359*.

At the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics, a racial hygienist measures a woman's features in an attempt to determine her racial ancestry. Berlin, Germany, date uncertain.

— National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

"SO I'D DEFINITELY RECOMMEND RHINOPLASTY..."

by SARAH BELLER

I held on to my secret plan the whole day, while I laughed with friends, took a math quiz, and ate lunch in the senior lounge at my Upper East Side private school. At the end of the day, instead of my usual routine of taking the M86 bus with Dana to the Upper West Side, where both our families lived, I left school without staying bye to anyone, made a left on Park, and walked south as quickly as I could without drawing attention.

My mother was constantly whining to my father, "Why can't we move to the Upper East Side? It's so much better than *here*." It didn't really matter to me, though, I hated them both, but I knew that the Upper East Side was its own strange universe. As I walked, I passed kids getting out of school—some in uniforms from the all-girls school nearby, some in Juicy Couture jumpsuits, or Seven jeans—a lot of not-white nannies taking care of white kids, and moms in expensive yoga clothes or business suits running errands. There were no men around; the fathers were at work. I made a right on 82nd and searched for number forty three.

"Yes, miss?" the doorman asked.

"Ummm," I couldn't bring myself to say it. *Madison Plastic Surgery*. "I think I'm going to Suite 1-C?"

"Yes, of course, right ahead," he said, unfazed.

The office, softly lit, all beige and pink, with black-and-white photos of flowers on the walls, looked more like a hotel lobby than a doctor's waiting room. I felt calmer than I'd been in a long time. Like my life was finally getting started. I was taking control. I'd expected the receptionist to be all swollen lips, perfect ski-slope nose, tight skin, blond hair...but instead she looked normal, medium pretty.

"I have an appointment for a consultation," I said, blushing.

"Of course," she said.

Sitting on a comfortable chair, I alternated between filling out forms and looking at myself in the mirrored wall. Like every day, I had on jeans and a sweatshirt, my frizzy hair pulled back in a bun. A pamphlet on the side table described the Mommy Special—"a collection of surgeries designed to restore your pre-pregnancy physique"—and the Bridal Package—"not just for brides, but for the entire bridal party."

I could see my future: the boyfriend who'd be handsome, but in a low-key way. He'd love reading, but also be good at sports. I pictured us making out against a brick wall. *You're the love of my life, you know that?* he'd ask. *You're the fire of my loins*, I'd purr, smiling seductively. We'd get married, our whole wedding party getting surgery on different body parts beforehand.

I fingered the slope of my nose self-consciously, thinking back to tennis practice when Jessie, Pam and Katie had been gossiping about Rachel, who wasn't there. I wasn't really friends with them, but we were on the team together.

"She really needs to get her nose fixed," Pam had said. "She'd look a lot better."

I waited for all of them to turn to me, for Pam to put her hand over her mouth in worry that she'd offended me. I felt hot,

my eyes stung. But they continued on. They hadn't noticed me, or hadn't thought I needed to get mine fixed, too. How did one know if one needed to get a nose fixed?

I knew what fixed meant, of course. My mom had explained it to me years ago. She'd found me sobbing in my room one day, and when she asked what was wrong, I told her I couldn't stand how ugly I was.

"I just can't bear it anymore," I cried.

I was too young now, only 13, my mom explained, but in a few years I could get a nose job.

I hadn't known what to say. In a way, it was a relief to know I was right, that there was something wrong with me. But it also ached, because deep deep down, I'd always hoped that I was imagining it. My mom touched her own nose and said, "Look, we have the same bump. I'm sorry I gave it to you."

She told me she'd always regretted not getting a nose job herself, and she didn't want that for me. My mom plucked her eyebrows into mean, thin arcs and woke up at 5:30 a.m. to meet with Peter, her personal trainer. She made recipes from cookbooks called *Hungry Girl to the Max* and *Skinny Bitch in the Kitch*.

"It's too late for me now," she said sadly, "but not for you."

For years after that I hated trying on clothes in stores. Dressing rooms had angled mirrors, so you had to see yourself in profile. I tried to position myself in conversations so that as few people as possible could see the side view of my face. Head on, I looked okay.

I'm just having a free consultation," I told myself as I waited. Nothing has to come of it. I secretly hoped they'd say, "You're crazy, you're a beautiful young girl, perfectly normal, and plastic surgery is for people who are in dire medical need." Then I could go on with my life. But another part of me hoped, masochistically, that they'd go to the other extreme. "Whoaahhh, boy, we got a red alert here, get out the knife, this is an emergency. How could you have waited so long, young lady?"

When the doctor called me in, he got right down to business.

"Can I touch your face?" he asked politely. I nodded.

"Okay, yes, I definitely see the problem areas," he said, turning my face gently from left to right.

"Now I'm going to show you our computer simulation, so you can see exactly what we can do for you, and what you'd look like after the procedures. Now look at the camera…."

He took a photo and my face popped up on the computer screen. It looked okay, I thought, but then he told me to turn to the side so he could do the profile. I felt a familiar wave of panic. It came up on the screen, looking the same as always. Whenever I saw my profile, I felt ashamed by my thoughts: I look like Nazi drawings of Jews during World War II. I'd seen the propaganda once on a school trip to the Holocaust museum, and I was devastated by the resemblance.

The doctor had started talking: "So I'd recommend definitely rhinoplasty, getting rid of the bump, and then also a chin implant to sort of even out the face…. It's very common, we do this all the time."

WHENEVER I SAW MY PROFILE, I FELT ASHAMED BY MY THOUGHTS: I LOOK LIKE NAZI DRAWINGS OF JEWS DURING WWII.

As he spoke, he dragged and clicked the cursor on the screen, stretching and pulling my face. I sat, mesmerized, watching myself transform.

"There, something like that is what I'm thinking," he said.

I looked at the girl on the screen. She did not look like me. She looked very normal. Pretty. Good. Nice. Sexy. I especially

Would the glass slipper still fit without the nose job?

liked the way the chin implant looked. I'd have never thought of that. It felt like I could suddenly read minds, or be invisible and hear what everyone thought of me without them knowing I was there. No one would ever have had the guts to tell me I needed a chin implant. But now I could clearly see how much it helped. It changed me from looking like a weak, ugly nerd to a pretty, confident American girl. And hearing the doctor discuss my appearance candidly, without excuse or apology, was deeply satisfying. I'd been used to friends who'd say, whenever I'd broach the subject, "Shut up! You're pretty!"

"Now that's better," the doctor said, staring at his screen. "Isn't that beautiful?" He called in a nurse.

"Oh yes, that looks really good," she said to me. "Do you like it?"

I nodded and asked if I could have a copy of the image.

"Of course," the doctor said. He handed me a glossy print-out and I studied it, trying to make it make sense. I jutted out my chin to look more like the girl.

"The recovery process typically takes about two weeks, with a full recovery after about six months. Following the procedure there may be nausea, headaches, swelling, bruising and nose-bleeds," the doctor said, his white teeth gleaming.

The doctor and nurse explained that they would render me unconscious and cut into my face with sharp tools. He touched my face as he described where he'd make "incisions"—inside my nose, in the skin that separates my nostrils—and I began to feel sick. They were speaking so quickly. Who the fuck were these people. This couldn't have been what my mom meant. I'd known what plastic surgery was, but there, in the office, I knew I hadn't really processed the violence of it. I hadn't, of course, told my mom about the consultation—I guess I hadn't wanted to give her the satisfaction. But suddenly I wished she were here.

I thought about my friends, and how I would tell them about this. It would be humiliating. My friends always derided people who "cheated," whether it was getting a prescription for Adderol that they didn't need, having their parents donate huge sums to colleges so they'd get in, or throwing up all their food so they'd be skinny. Like Amy, who had the perfect body—she was thin and toned and had perfect, lush breasts—but threw up noisily in the bathrooms in the gym so everyone knew it didn't really count.

"Okay, take your time," the doctor said, ready to move on to his next patient. "It's a big decision, but I think it would look really great."

I walked out of the office in a daze, my hand in my pocket, clutching the folded print-out. Halfway across Central Park, I slowly crumpled up the print-out and tossed it in a garbage bin, tears dripping down my defiant, undersized chin.

I cared more about what my friends thought of me than what my mom thought. It was too late for her, but maybe not for me. ■

Sarah Beller is a writer living in Brooklyn. Some of her work can be found at thehairpin.com, thefix.com, takethehandle.com and xojane.com.

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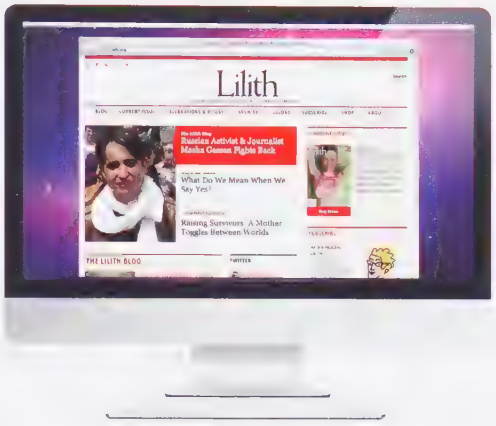

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Blackberries

by RONIT FEINGLASS PLANK

A YEAR BEFORE MY MOTHER dropped us off with our father in New Jersey so she could follow her heart and go to India, she took custody of my younger sister and me. We were just back from living on a kibbutz in Be'er Sheva, and had no family to speak of out in Seattle, so she dragged us wherever she needed to, whether it was appropriate for a six-year-old and a four-year-old or not. We went to meditation groups for a famous Indian guru she was devotedly following, to places where she chanted all day, to all kinds of different people's houses. I never wanted to go to these places but my mom got me to cooperate with promises of fun and food. And then later, when fun was getting hard to believe, it was the food that drove me; it was the one thing I could look forward to.

All it took was the pledge of a treat and I climbed into our old wood-paneled station wagon. When her guru group held a party one Sunday afternoon, I cashed in as soon as we arrived and took my cookie outside to eat. The adults were lying around the grass with languid smiles, massaging each other. Their eyes stopped just short of focusing somehow, I couldn't tell if they were actually seeing anything they looked at. There were no other children around so I sat near one of my mom's friends, one I knew, and ate my cookie. After a while she gave my foot a little massage, so I gave her a foot rub back. She told me I had strong hands, and especially strong thumbs so I kept massaging, as powerfully as I could. I felt useful. Which is not the same as important, but it was good to have a place.

That same summer, my mom took us to another friend's house with the promise of blackberry pie. Her friend lived near the water in a house by herself, she didn't have any kids and she was thin, kind of pinched. When she met me and my sister no light sparked in her eyes and for the rest of the day she made no effort at connection. It was as if we were just unavoidable features of my mother's life.

Shortly after we arrived, the woman announced we were going blackberry picking for the pie. This was bad news on the one hand; the pie was not even nearly ready. But picking as much food off a bush as I could eat sounded all right.

The berries grew on the bank along the water and some of the bushes were best reached by wading in the chilly lake.

My sister and I trailed behind, like afterthoughts.

This was not my favorite part, I didn't like being cold and I hated the spider webs that had woven together some of the brambles, making it even harder to pick berries among the thorns. Spiders on berries seemed unfair. My mother picked berries up ahead with her friend; my sister and I trailed behind, like afterthoughts.

When we were finished picking, we went back to the house and my sister and I watched the woman make the crust. We stood in the kitchen, still as we could, as she tumbled the berries into the pie shell, cut the remaining dough into strips, and crossed them over the top. She put the pie in the oven and soon there was the smell of warm doughy fruit. In that stiff quiet house my stomach growled and curled in on itself but I stayed quiet. I knew not to ask for anything.

At last the pie came out. The deep purple juice shined and bubbled. Soft, shapeless pieces of berry poked out between the criss-cross crust. I moved closer as the woman placed it gently beside four plates and a knife. But she didn't cut up slices. She sat back down with my mother as if the pie we'd all worked hard for wasn't out and ready.

My stomach twisted. I couldn't take it anymore. I looked at my sister for courage. She looked back at me, her green eyes wide with waiting. From beneath her mop of knotted curly hair, she arched her eyebrows and pursed her lips, but remained

silent. It would be up to me. I turned back to the adults who were sitting at the kitchen table and said excuse me, can we have the pie now? My mom's friend finished her sentence before she looked over. You have to wait until it's cool, she answered, and then she went on talking to my mom. My mother said nothing.

Finally the woman cut the pie and my mother handed me a slice. I'd never eaten homemade pie before; every baked good I knew came from a package. I took a taste of the gooey dark insides but the pie burned my mouth before I could taste any of its sweetness. I kept eating anyway. I ate the whole slice, searching with each bite for the payoff, a sugary rush, a burst of fresh fruit, the richness of butter. But there was nothing so satisfying about it. In fact, I didn't like that pie at all.

I used to think it was because I didn't like that woman. I thought it was her fault my mom wasn't really with us that day. But she wasn't the one who took my mom away from me. And it wasn't the Indian guru's fault either, or the people my mom met at all his parties. Being with my mom could not ever be what me and my sister hoped for because although she was there, she couldn't really see us. Even before she left, part of her was already gone. ■

Ronit Feinglass Plank's writing has appeared in Niche Magazine, Switchback, and Red Fez. She won Switchback's May 2012 flash fiction contest and has also written and performed her own work for the theatre. Just nominated for a Pushcart prize, Plank lives in Seattle.

Challah

by LEORA IFRAILOVA

IT WAS FRIDAY MORNING IN THE YEAR 2000 when I walked in on Mama crying. She didn't see me come in, so I huddled behind a chair and listened in on her conversation to God. She prayed that my older sister and I would grow up to be nice modest girls and only give forth good to the world, since it offered only good to us. She poured out her *tefillos* to the One Above about how much she wanted me to do well in school. I was slower than my sister and didn't quite understand the lessons as well as my classmates. I was six at the time.

Mama prayed, in a Russian-English mixture, for a better income, better neighbors, and God's constant protection. This wasn't for her, though; it was for her children. When women turn into mothers they evolve into something more

And so I started crying, too.

nurturing. How? How can people look at mothers and children and say being a mother is a 'mistake'? How? All a mother does is offer love and understanding, a shoulder to cry on, not for herself, for her children. And so I started crying, too.

I cried until Mama heard me, came over, and forced a smile on her face that soon put one on mine as well. She reminded me it was Friday and there was much to be done. I knew my job was to peel the vegetables, but Mama said no. It was still early summertime and *Shabbos* was starting later.

"We have time," she said.

"For what?" I inquired.

"For challah."

So Mama took the flour and I grabbed the eggs and we dedicated that Friday to challah-making. The truth is, my grades did go up, and our income improved, and in all honesty that challah was amazing. ■

Leora Ifrailova, 18, lives in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. A freelance writer, she has published in The Jewish Voice as well as other sites and publications. She can be reached at leoraifrailova@yahoo.com.

WEB EXTRAS:
Find links to related articles "When Our Parents Neglected to Save the World," and "Red Diaper Daughter," with this section at Lilith.org.

Analyze *This:*

Why Do Therapy and Jewish Women Go Together?

Not long ago at a packed synagogue service, the rabbi happened to ask the congregation, "How many of you are psychotherapists?" A stunning number of hands shot up and the congregation burst into laughter. "How many of you are *in* therapy?" he then joked, since the spirit had suddenly become intimate. Even more hands, followed by so much laughter it rattled the *yizkor* plaques.

It wasn't that any of us were surprised by this—after all, the lobby directories in the synagogue's urban neighborhood are virtual decalogues of Weinberg and Goldman and Rifkin psychotherapy practices—it was more like something had been broached that none of us had exactly thought through; like an emotionally complex secret had been outed that felt sweet or canny or embarrassing or maybe hilarious. We didn't know. Most of the hands belonged to women.

Sometime after that, I attended the Psychotherapy Networker Symposium in Washington, D.C., an annual conference of 3000-plus people that is 80% female and overwhelmingly Jewish. By the look of the crowds muscling through the hotel hallways, it could have passed for a Hadassah convention. It got me wondering: *Why are Jewish women so over-represented as shrinks? And why are so many of us also among the shrunken?*

It's true that as the psychotherapy profession has increasingly yielded to less intellectually rewarding orientations and as the field has become less lucrative by the day, fewer Jewish women are choosing to enter it. But it's also true that if you're reading this, you're either a therapist, or someone who's been to one, or one degree of separation from same. So I decided to interview several dozen women, mostly practitioners* (plus some clients/patients), to ask whether and how they thought that being Jewish and female informed their work in the therapy room.

Do you think Jewish women are particularly good at rupture and repair? I asked. Do you feel you've inherited the long Jewish tradition of *pilpul* [dialectical thinking], of learning in pairs, of sitting with multiple truths, of tolerating doubt, of skepticism, of pre-occupation with redemption? Of jokes about reasoning, of memory as the most moving category of experience?

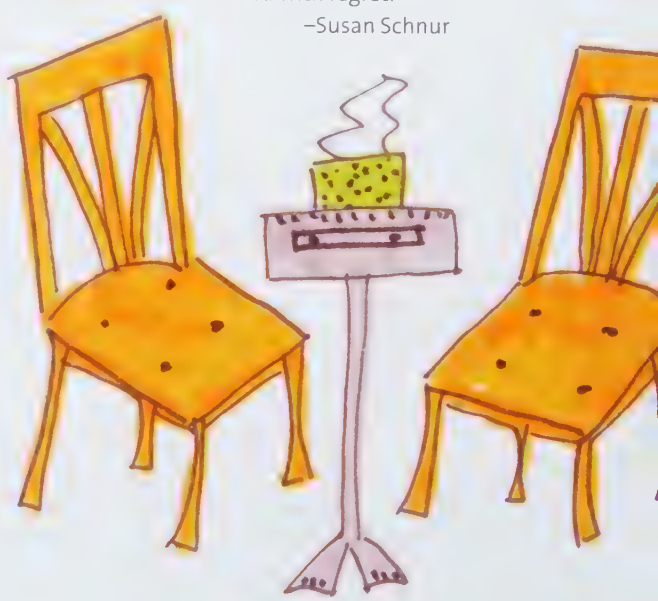
Is Freud a secular Rashi? Do women or Jews seem attuned to "yearning" in an acoustically special way? Does the timbre or range of your emotions, or your dutiful witnessing, feel Jewish or womanly? Do you carry transgenerational *rachmones* or trauma? As a Jewish woman, do you have a culturally specific ear for bullshit and for calling it out? Did you *need* to be a healer?

As someone who herself became a rabbi and then a clinical psychologist, I'm aware of having been deeply affected by the Mishnaic cornerstones of my day school education: "Acquire a friend with whom to study," "Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given," and "*hafach ba v'hafach ba*"—"Turn it and turn it [a sacred text] for everything is in it."

Does talking about Jewish stuff in therapy stir people up? Yes, my informants said, which is why we so often don't do it. *Are the dynamics different,* I asked, *when your patient (or therapist) is Jewish or female?* Often, yes. *Do you cherish the work you do?* Every single psychotherapist said yes to that.

The stories that follow are all "as told to" me, edited with considerable *naches* and condensed with regret.

–Susan Schnur



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ILENE BECKERMAN

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My Grandmom Made Me a Therapist

LOIS BRAVERMAN, SOCIAL WORKER, NEW YORK*

Growing up, my grandmother was my roommate; we shared a dresser, a closet, in a little working-class row-house in Philadelphia. She came from Minsk and was the oldest of seven sisters. Every day she called every sister on the phone, a couple of hours a day; she must have been viewed by her sisters as an incredible listener.

I'd come home from school, she'd be in the kitchen, and I'd pick up the extension in my parents' bedroom; stealthy, you had to breathe very quietly. It was much more interesting than TV. About husbands, children, worries, why is he doing this, why isn't she coming home in time. The talk of women, trying to understand and accept human frailty, suffering, disappointments. It wasn't about the stock market. Did he lose his job? She lost a pregnancy, who was angry at whom, was it reasonable.

One of my great-aunts saw a married man until his wife died, then she married him. That was a scandal. All of these different configurations are a part of life. It was all about the relationships. The idea of being in contact every day! My grandmother would go across town by public transportation, for a week, to stay with Aunt Shirley and my cousins—unlike me, they were not so happy to share a room—and my mother was expected to call her every day.

When I left home and got married, might we live in Philly? Where would we live? My mother said, "Well, of course you'll call me every day." I said, "I don't think so." I didn't want to have to report everything. But I understood "reporting"—there was this expectation. You would have a close, intimate knowledge of what everybody was doing and feeling and thinking *every single day*.

Let's Make a Big Deal Out of Everything

JUDITH RABINOR, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, NEW YORK*

I treat eating disorders and I say to my patients, I feel like a friggin' talmudic scholar, turning over every behavior, every dream, every word. There's not *one* reason that someone gets an eating disorder; it's a metaphor for all these issues underneath. We investigate, we investigate, we investigate. That's what therapists do. Also, therapists don't have to stay on topic. Is that Jewish? Maybe. What I love about a session is you don't have a goal; the goal is to investigate.

I don't love being in synagogue, but I love the concept of a *mishkan*, a sanctuary. People need a safe place; they need to feel their body is safe, but it's something they're angry about, they fight, they can't breathe and relax. So my office becomes their mishkan.

A lot of my work is to help people learn that having company in life makes life better. Judaism strongly believes in not being alone—a study partner, a marriage, a community, a *minyan*. I had an eating disordered patient who didn't want to join a group. "I don't want to tell anyone about my eating disorder, why would I join a group?" But then she was like a mother in that group, her disorder got so much better.

Therapists do not tolerate elephants in a room. We call it out. That feels Jewish. I'm always looking for elephants. Often we don't know what the elephant is. That's what I'm doing; underneath the story there's another story. *One* elephant? There are elephants under elephants. People are mysterious, things are never what you think, there's never a one-to-one. Toilet training?... you can never say one thing causes another. I think this is very Jewish, do you?

I saw this movie, the story of Otto Frank, with old newsreels of concentration camps and barbed wire, and he says, "I would shovel shit, but in my head I was playing Mozart." We're all always playing something in our head, and that's more powerful than reality. If you *think* it's freezing, it's freezing. I think it's very Jewish to think about what you think. That's one goal for me, that people stop being mad at themselves and they kind of understand they are a big puzzle and they come to appreciate complexity, to embrace it.

I do think that Jews live with more dread ...that things happen, we know that, like other discriminated-against people. Empathy is a key component of being Jewish. At our seder, we know it's not *them* who crossed the Red Sea, it's us, all of us at any time who are ever hurt. We cross the Red Sea.

Anne Frank introduced me to the power of the internal world; she kept a journal. I was 10, 12, the same age as Anne, and my grandmother took me to Broadway to see *The Diary of Anne Frank*, this heroic little girl who was imprisoned in this room, but could still see the light. The next day I started a journal. I felt,

If I go to a Jewish shrink and tell her my mother was a child refugee during the Holocaust, it's like, bingo! there's 10 years of therapy right there. If I tell it to a non-Jewish therapist, "Oh, isn't that interesting. Tell me more."

"No, I don't want to tell you more. I don't want to educate you about it."

I go to this male, Jewish, eccentric psychiatrist. He was taking my history and I mentioned my mother was a child refugee during the Holocaust.

"So you have that, *" he said, and then went on to his next question.*

KAREN PROPP, BOSTON, MA

*As told to Susan Schnur; edited and condensed.

I want to help people who have problems. There was such a richness to Anne's inner world.

The idea of delving into unhappiness, my mother and father were very big on, "Go out and get some fresh air, it will make you feel better," but I knew I would feel better if I talked to my best friend. "Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing"—that was kind of the "subtitle" of *The Diary*.

When I became a therapist, I thought, "Oh my God, I get paid to do the thing I like best in the world, talking to people deeply," and I feel I'm very good at getting under the main menu. But I also have lots of patients writing in journals like Anne Frank; I want them to get to know themselves. This is nice, but it's 45 minutes a week, what *else* can you do when you feel really alone at night?

My grandmother was a writer, but my mother was into shopping, not the internal world. I felt sad because my best friend dropped me. If my best friend dropped me, I felt destroyed, bereft, there were traumas all over my life. My mother felt you get over things. I've gone into a field where you make a big deal out of everything; this is talmudic. You think you're overweight because you love chocolate, and I think you love chocolate because you were missing a real sense of nurturance and nourishment in your life. You remember eating whole candy bags when you were five, you think you were a sneaky girl, sneaking candy. I think you were a sad girl. It's more, for me, that I felt that talking deeply was the best thing in the world.

My mother was boring … okay, now I have compassion on her. She was a cultured woman, but she went to the opera and would tell me what people wore, she could talk on and on about sales in Bloomingdales, what people ate in restaurants. I didn't want to grow up to have endless conversations, "How do you slice the tomatoes?" "Ma, any way you slice them, it's okay with me."

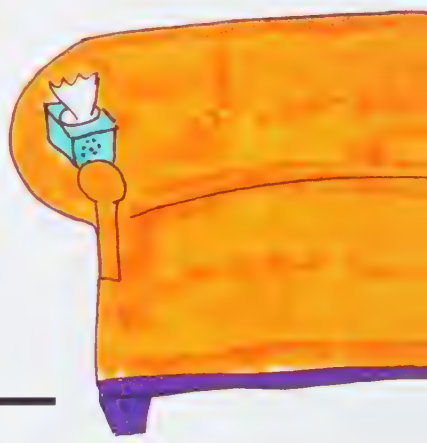
The thing with me is, I *love* listening to stories, any stories, long boring stories that nobody else wants to listen to. I can have a conversation that someone else would die from. I just feel that if you listen long enough, with a broad enough lens, you hear so many things in the story. I like this intensity—*that* I think is part of the Jewish spirit. I have this very big New York clang to my personality, very Jewish, and I just feel it's *me*. I'm very proud of being Jewish, I don't mind if I sound like a New York Jew.

My husband and I have been in couples counseling with both Jewish and non-Jewish therapists, and with the non-Jewish ones, we had much better outcomes. Jewish styles tend toward enmeshment, that big-bosomed thing, and with three Jews in the room we'd feel engulfed, like you're going to overwhelm them, they're going to overwhelm you. It was hard to separate "good" close from "bad" close.

Non-Jewish therapists with very strong boundaries, very clear; warm, but not in a frightening way—that's a better match. They're going to hold back. It's very safe.

A PSYCHIATRIST, AUSTIN, TEXAS

I once gave a talk in the Midwest, I was talking about how I talk to patients about food, about how rabbinic it is to find out exactly how someone eats their bagel. So I'll say to a young girl, "Tell me about the bagel, how you eat the bagel." She'll say, "I eat the bagel without dough." Someone raises her hand, "What is a bagel without dough?" I explain that in New York there are different ways of eating bagels. This patient of mine was picking out the dough. In talking about all the rituals that go along with eating, you get a sense of a person and then you can ask, "What are the other rituals in your life?" We all have established rituals about food, and so from there we slide into everything. That's Jewish.



The Therapeutic Dyad is Totally Jewish

LORI HOPE LEFKOVITZ, PROFESSOR OF JEWISH STUDIES, BOSTON*

Saying things out loud that other people don't has a very Jewish feel to me. And Jewish women, stereotypically, are not decorous. We're brazen and impolite, specially Jewish mothers, speaking our piece. To "waste one's time" talking about feelings, that's female. So of course therapy is full of Jewish women.

The whole Jewish, suburban, kitchen-table culture is informally therapeutic; it *was* therapy before America became a therapized culture and could afford it. It's also "ethnic"—African-American, Italian; you puzzle out your world by telling each other about your lives and making sense of it around a table.

Not so long ago, most Jews as a community lived the rhythms of a therapeutic life. There were calendar times for relationship repair and legislated emotional states, like mandating joy on Sukkot or Purim, and creating the conditions in which to have these feelings. The Passover seder has a therapeutic quality; we tell a national story about liberation and translate it into our personal lives. I would guess that Jews lived all the holidays psychologically. Now these functions are also

translated into explicitly therapeutic space, and Jews have become therapists and patients.

The therapeutic dyad is obviously Jewish, and I surmise was familiar to Freud from the tradition of *chevrusa*, Jewish learning in pairs. There's something tremendously exciting about working intimately, intensely, with one other person over a text you love. Freud understood "labor" as channeling libido; it's "hot" to study. Imagine when the text is yourself or the relationship in the therapeutic room. There's lots of potential, the kind of energy flow you see in religious ecstasy, but safe, contained.

Jewish people are traumatized, maybe it's inherited and "forgotten," so we come to therapy with a history of pain and with strategies we've informally developed for dealing with it. My parents are survivors, so I have the experience of their resilience, and also of living with the knowledge that they suffered immense loss. Often children of survivors parent their parents; you're more careful, you enact a therapeutic role. You withhold the natural role of being cared for, and you're emotionally alert, psychologically alert.

We're taught that the Torah has 70 faces; there isn't a *single* truth. We're also taught that everything is *in* the Torah, but with a hitch: we have to find it. So Jews learned to search and to find ways to tell a story. The therapeutic practice of endless reinterpretation founded on the conviction that one story can yield many meanings—Jews are practiced at this! There's something Jewish about all things analytic. Freud emerged right out of Talmud study.

Jews also have a fabulous tradition of not forgetting to remember to forget. We grog out Haman's name, we blot out Amalek—it's a commitment of erasure. This is therapeutic shuttling between memory [*zachor*] and forgetfulness. My father kept a diary, he was uneducated because he spent his high school years in Auschwitz: "*There must have been other times in history when people were praying for the Messiah in vain* [spelled "woine"]. *For thos people probible was jost es bad thos days then for me now. To bad I hed to discover this in Auschwitz where I can do nothing about enithing.*" This is therapy: empathy, feelings of futility, the redemptive possibilities that can emerge from overcoming trauma.

Freud understood "labor" as channeling libido; it's "hot" to study. Imagine when the text is yourself!

The culture of the *shidduch* [arranged marriage] connects for me with being a therapist because there's a

Is She or Isn't She? Fixating on Whether or Not My Shrink Is Jewish

I've been with my shrink for 10 years and I really really don't *want to know if she's Jewish. Her last name is unidentifiable. She could be Jewish, she laughs in the right places. But I'm a professor of Middle Eastern Studies, I profess support for both Israelis and Palestinians, so I have a backlog of getting attacked by both sides. If I knew my shrink was Jewish, I'd have to deal with more of this. Besides, if you're Jewish, no one else is ever exactly the right* kind *of Jew. I carry around a lot of disappointment about how other Jews are Jewish, so if my shrink were Jewish, I'd have to feel my judgment of her. Not knowing is good avoidance. I don't have to experience the unsafety of our specific differences.*

But what if my shrink is a Jewishly illiterate Jew? She probably is, I have to explain Hebrew words to her. It's so widespread not to have competence around your Judaism; it's the only area where Jews are proud to be illiterate. We're proud to be assimilated, that we can "pass." Being Jewish is not like having black skin or being in a wheelchair—identities that force you to think about your difference. Jews have the complicated luxury of not having to articulate identity. If my shrink and I spoke about this in the room, whoof! Our avoidance of this topic, after 10 years, is probably bad.

But if I found out she was not Jewish.... Well, her husband has a more Jewish name, but the way he pronounces it isn't Jewish. Maybe he's from the South, maybe he grew up in a place where no one knew how to pronounce a Jewish name. If I found out that he's Jewish and she's not? That would explain a lot, that she doesn't have an affect I peg as Jewish, but she still seems to "get" it. People who are smart, warm, alternative—they seem Jewish to me, but I know that's just a feeling, a prejudice that's not always true.

But if I found out she is *Jewish? It would be fine. I don't know. Either way. That's why I haven't pushed it. Maybe on some level, I do assume she is. I so treasure the intelligence and angle that she brings to what I bring that the question of Jewishness becomes irrelevant. I feel so "seen" and "held" by her... so she's probably Jewish. But she doesn't know a lot of the details of Jewishness, which of course doesn't make me think she's not Jewish.*

Anyway, it's a great pleasure bringing my shrink my interpretation of a parsha, *how I interpret it as meditation instructions. I love turning people on to the underlying spiritual dimensions of Judaism, the Four Worlds. So maybe my compulsive teaching trumps whether I care if she's Jewish or not. Nah, that's bullshit.*

A PATIENT, BOCA RATON, FL*

*As told to Susan Schnur; edited and condensed.

Jewish tolerance for fools; the *shadchan* knew—everybody knew—that there was "somebody for everybody." There's a cosmic correction, it all makes sense.

Being Jewish is also perspective-setting. Participating in community, living the rhythms of a ritual life, having access to a time-honored alternative culture. It gives you a place to go when the pressures of secular material consumerism are damaging; it's therapy, a resource for experiencing well-being. You look at a pimple on your nose and see a volcano, you have a place of escape that reminds you to count your blessings, to pray; you have a whole system. And if you're volunteering in a soup kitchen, say, your pimple matters less.

Jewish women are doubly defined against the norm. Normatives don't question their identity, but non-normatives learn to think, "What's it mean to be me?"

What Jewish Women Dislike about Themselves (and Me)

LAURA BROWN, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, SEATTLE*

I have to say that Jewish, female clients definitely bring out something different in me. I have to work hard at this "how-is-this-person-not-like-me" challenge. In the beginning, I was surprised by the degree to which other Jewish women felt alienated from Jewish culture; I myself had such a positive Jewish experience, with education and powerful women role models. I hadn't appreciated how unusual this was. Therapy is not as Jewish a profession in Seattle as it was in Cleveland, where I grew up, so discovering a quite non-Jewish psychotherapy community was a big surprise.

The clients for whom my Jewishness has been most salient and powerful have not been Jews. On the ground here in Seattle, Jews are a little scarce; many people have had little to no contact with a Jew until they walk into my office. Because I can offer an alternative to dominant (a.k.a. Christian) norms for, say, forgiveness, conflict or grief, I can illuminate different ways to be in the world. Clients find this valuable. At times I'm seen as the exotic "Other," but such are the vicissitudes of transference.

I think that internalized sexism affects some of my Jewish female clients' ability to bond with me; they don't like themselves for being or looking like a Jew, and I am not only very overtly a Jew culturally and intellectually, but I'm also a physical prototype, zaftig with curly, wild hair. I represent what Jewish women dislike in themselves. I then struggle in myself to have compassion for their negative stereotypes about Jews and Judaism, and this plays out in the therapeutic relationship.

I've run into this a lot—Jewish male therapists being very competitive with powerful Jewish women.

At age 9, I decided to become a psychologist, and in my case the stereotype of difficult families spawning good therapists was painfully true. I was the oldest child, the only daughter of a very depressed woman. Her gender and mine had a lot to do with my career choice.

As a client, I've only had one Jewish therapist, a male with a nasty "Jewish mother" countertransference who was undermining in very destructive ways. I've run into this a lot with Jewish male therapists being much more competitive with powerful Jewish women. My other therapists have been non-Jewish women. One in particular, a child-refugee from Cuba, really understood issues of exile and alienation—from both the dominant culture and one's own—and she was able to connect with me around how being a Jew is so important to my sense of self.

Therapy Feels Very New Jersey

ANNE WALDOKS, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, BOSTON*

Growing up in Teaneck, NJ, my family would often visit my grandmother in Leonia, in a little split-level shared by the larger family. My grandmother downstairs, my uncle and his family in the central house, and my cousin's family on the third floor. We would come over, a lot of women, and there were two kitchens, but my grandmother's little kitchen downstairs,

that's where the action was. Everything got talked about—every aspect of everybody's problems and glories, and the state of the world.

Like in many Jewish homes, a lot of talking about feelings happened around the children; the adults were completely comfortable with that. It was part of life's fabric to express feelings, to be at home with anger—like in Italian families, of which New Jersey has lots. WASPS are not so comfortable talking about, or even thinking about, feelings, but my family, like most Jewish ones, was warm, come-right-in, permeable boundaries. It was beckoning, but it's the good *with* the bad.... And Jewish women are power holders at home, we're confident about that, so we set the tone, and what do we do? We talk about *feelings*. Maybe this is why Jewish men are so often emotionally available.

From the youngest age, I sat next to my dad in shul, playing with his *tzitzis* and having the Torah stories trickle in. I felt like Jewish life was built around studying people's lives: what did Moses do, and Rebecca, and Joseph; it was the highest value to examine lives, to overcome obstacles in being human, to think about the consequences in all relationships—intergenerational, business, peer—how we all struggle with being human. The people in the Torah, they were all flawed! We don't have a Jesus ideal; there was no expectation that any person would achieve grace and perfection. Jews take it for granted that if you're human, you have interesting stuff to work on.

When Jewish women think about choosing a profession, being a therapist feels like an important and worthy thing to do. As Jews in a Christian host country, we see ourselves as "different from." Jews are a quirky people. We're interested in how we are different, as a people, as individuals. It's not just "let's fix it." It's "let's be interested and informed about difference. Let's strive to *be known*."

As a psychologist, I sit there thinking, "I'm so *here* for you!" We're two people sitting in a room together, and the goal is for me to give you permission to be *totally known*. I strive to extend that invitation. I tie this in emotionally to the New Jersey ethos that I grew up in: women as *tummlers*, all the women in the Bible working the family system.

For me, coming-of-age in the 1970's, there was a funny glass ceiling for how professional I could be as a woman. In my circle, becoming a doctor would have been a little too much for the girl in the family; there was some sexism, girls shouldn't do all that. Being a psychologist, this was the closest I could get to being a doctor. The directness, the emotional complexity, being *so in the mix*—it feels very Jewish to me, very New Jersey. Sitting and talking to somebody is like breathing and swallowing.

I love New Jersey.

Going to Jewish therapists would feel, ugh, claustrophobic, unsafe, like they were my parents. But a lot of what I want to talk about in therapy directly or indirectly involves Jews or Judaism, and I often feel worried about confirming a stereotype that I imagine my non-Jewish therapist might deep-down believe. So the subject of Judaism has actually never come up explicitly in my own sessions...or in my work.

As a burgeoning social worker, Freud and psychoanalysis seem so old-fashioned compared to Buddhism and mindfulness; I'm very interested in mindfulness-based practices. Still, psychoanalytic theory feels so familiar, so Jewish, something I grew up in.

A CLIENT AND STUDENT-CLINICIAN, BLOOMINGTON, IN

The Elephants in That Room

RACHEL JOSEFOWITZ SIEGEL, SOCIAL WORKER, ITHACA, NEW YORK*

I co-founded the agency for battered women in Ithaca, New York, and I'm convinced that my Jewish background brought me to do this. These women's traumatizations were silenced, and so was the traumatization of my childhood. I was born in Berlin in 1924, and I didn't have words for the Jewish condition. We had a lively, colorful family; we didn't talk about anti-Semitism.

When I encountered Jean Baker Miller's feminist work about subordinates and oppressors, it changed my life—how subordinates "know much more about the dominants than vice versa; they have to become highly attuned to the dominants, able to predict their reactions of pleasure and displeasure." I thought, "Ah!

*As told to Susan Schnur; edited and condensed.

After losing my mother at a young age, 24, I chose a therapist who would be my surrogate Jewish mother. My mother couldn't stand anyone leaving her; if I packed to go away, she had to physically leave the house. When she got sick, I switched schools and a career track to care for her. I had a brother, a medical miracle, whom my parents overprotected until he died.

My mother didn't want me far from her for reasons I understood only posthumously; when people had left her, she never saw them again. She became separated from her family at age nine during the Holocaust. My father, too. I didn't know this. They never cried in their coffee.

I needed a therapist who was strong like my mom, with a lot of saichel *about life; someone who would champion my living my own life, who would be incredibly instrumental to my growing up; someone kind and caring who would show me how to become the professional I wanted to be.*

I also needed a therapist who treasured Judaism as life-affirming and celebratory. I never knew the joy of Judaism. The joy? I had to shed the shame and the victim-feeling to emerge into the beauty of Judaism and go forth with a happy life.

It's a story of healing. I did a Jewish mother transference; that's what I needed to do.

A CLIENT, BETHESDA, MD*

The long practice of reading many small signals!" As a feminist therapist, I look at power: When a woman reports feeling depressed at work, is it a sexist environment? There were no bat mitzvahs back then, in my childhood, what does that tell a 13-year-old girl? When your brother gets circumcised and there's a fuss, nobody made a fuss over you! Feminist therapy minimizes the power relationship within the client/therapist dyad, too: the client is her own best expert, she knows more about her life.

My mother was a defiant rabbi's daughter who left home against her father's wishes to study midwifery for two years in Vilna; she was very proud of studying human anatomy at a time when women were supposed to stay ignorant about their bodies. Mutti once delivered a child in a very poor household with nothing to wrap the baby in. She took off her slip and tore it up. Both my parents were rescuers; my father got every single relative to leave Europe. We were always taking care of people.

My first therapist, a non-Jewish male. One day, in the middle of our session, the once-daily train from New York to Ithaca came through. "Hear the train?" I said. He found that resistant: "What's really on your mind?" He wanted to hear about my infant sexuality.

"Well, the train, damn it, from Berlin to Switzerland, before Hitler." It was a huge disruption and I needed to talk about it; it brought up the wanderings of my family. Later I had a Jewish therapist, a feminist; his wife was the head of the N.O.W. chapter in Syracuse. With him, being Jewish was no longer the elephant in the room. I felt freer; we talked about Jewish things; it made a real difference. He'd throw in a word of Yiddish; it was very comforting.

Freud's attitude to religion is still with us; an awful lot of Jewish therapists are anti-religious or non-religious, and we're not sufficiently comfortable with spiritual matters. Among therapists who are uneducated Jews, there's ignorance…however, I do think this is changing.

Transgenerational transmission of trauma? Absolutely; certainly for me. My parents' experience of life in the shtetl, the daily fear, the pogroms, this colors everything I know. Jewish paranoia is rooted in a fundamental reality; it needs to be acknowledged. Understanding the transmission of paranoia has been a major task for me personally—learning to separate, to give up the generalization of fear. It's the Jewish inheritance.

The *Tikkun Olam* of Kitty Genovese

NECHAMA LISS-LEVINSON, PSYCHOLOGIST/ PSYCHOANALYST, GREAT NECK, NY*

I'm a traditional Jew, so Judaism is the prism through which I see life, like eyeglasses I wear wherever I am. When I meet a new client, I'm grounded in the knowledge that we're all created with the divine spark, so I believe everyone is worthwhile. You may not believe it, with depression or low self-esteem, but I do.

If a client's depressed, I integrate *tikkun olam* into our work, encouraging them to volunteer, offering websites and resources. There is a tremendous benefit, not only in terms of developing empathy, but in developing a healthier sense of self and a perspective on your own troubles. In Judaism there's also the idea that even poor people should give *tzedakah*—you are never too poor to help someone else. Tzedakah develops self-empowerment and worth, you still have the ability to improve the life of someone else. Giving tzedakah can be a very successful intervention.

The Talmud says that "a dream that is not understood is like a letter that is not opened." I love to work with dreams, they extend the meaning that the client and I create together. In fact, there's a prayer that asks God to help us interpret our dreams.

When I was a girl, a phrase in the morning prayers particularly spoke to me: *"These are the things whose fruits a person enjoys in this world and the interest is in the world-to-come: honoring your mother and father, acts of kindness, attendance at a house of study…and bringing peace between an individual and their friend."* I had wanted to do something grand to help the world—make peace between Israel and the Arabs—and it felt to me that it was maybe bigger than I could handle. I kind of had to downsize. I could, though, "bring peace between an individual and their friend." I could be a therapist.

When I was 12, in 1964, right after Kitty Genovese had been murdered in Kew Gardens, Queens (while

38 people watched and did nothing), my parents, who always emphasized making the world a better place, went to Manhattan and stumbled on a crime scene—a man was dead and another man was running from the scene. They ran after him for many blocks until they found a police officer and shouted, "This man left the scene of a crime!"

The next day The New York Times wrote my parents up as the "anti-Genovese couple." The man they'd chased had committed a murder. It was a pivotal story for me as a child, knowing this about my parents. *You should never look away, you should always step forward.* As a teenager, I became more religiously observant and I still am.

Judaism offers me an existential anchor in life; it says there is meaning to the way you live it. Therapy is about making meaning, too…and becoming a clinician involves healing some sadness of your own.

I love the work I do.

"Don't Worry... I'm Holding Your Story"

ANONYMOUS, SOCIAL WORKER, LOS ANGELES*

I have a Jewish client going through chemo, young like me, she is horribly miserable; a butch dyke. We have a shorthand for making fun of her mother that feels Jewish. Her mother tells her, "You have to get a wig! You have to get a wig! You can't walk around bald, *drawing attention*!" Sometimes she comes in bald,

If we're both carrying the memory, we can change it. That's my experience of therapy, and of practicing Judaism.

sometimes with a hat. I'm like, "What a relief you got a hat so you don't *draw attention*." She feels known and seen in the same intimate way she's so unknown and unseen.

Growing up, my family dealt with secrets in this complex way that I think of as very Jewish. Everybody knows that Uncle Lou is a ____. We're going to talk about it, and we'll talk about it being a secret, and we'll *not* talk about it at all, and we'll not talk about it yet—all at the same time. There aren't secrets, *okay there's a secret*!! I think this comfort with simultaneity lets me, in therapy, shine a light on something and then say okay I can walk *around* this thing with you for a little while, we can jump all over it, ignore it.... It's all okay.

To me, Judaism is story after story—the Purim story, the coat of many colors, Jonah in the whale. It's about this most important job of telling the stories again and again, of *holding* them so they don't get lost. Therapy is also about being that person to hold the stories, and the memory; this is the most precious thing. *L'dor vah'dor*, holding memory for the generations: "I've still got this whole thing! Don't worry! I promise we're not going to lose it." Holding a client's stories for her, holding a client's memories, feels so Jewish, and if we're holding it all securely…we can change it. That's my experience of therapy, and of being Jewish.

I go to a queer synagogue where most of us do Judaism differently from how we grew up, a lot of us came here from the East Coast. Our havurah came to my family's sukkah, and the way that we built the sukkah and used the sukkah, it was spiritually very different. My Jewishness feels so secure that I can change it.

A lot of Jewish female therapists I know have this *tikkun olam* idea of changing the world one-person-at-a-time, while men are so, "We've got a new theory." My grandparents were very philanthropic. "Did I find a bargain," my grandfather in Florida would say. "One dollar each for these stuffed animals, so I bought the whole thing and brought 10 bags over to the hospital!" That combination feels so Jewish to me: the bargain, the unself-conscious generosity, the always thinking about who you can heal.

*As told to Susan Schnur; edited and condensed.

Despite Myself: Ending Up with a Jewish, Feminist Therapist

A PATIENT, ST. PAUL, MN*

I've been in therapy for most of my waking life and I specifically didn't want a Jewish therapist. I also didn't want a child-of-survivors therapist, because then the therapist would be doing her own therapy through me.

So I picked someone I was positive wasn't Jewish: Elizabeth Bonner—I should know her name, I wrote her checks for a thousand years. One day I come to therapy and the name on the door is no longer Elizabeth, it's Peninah. So I ask her. "Are you *Jewish*?" She tells me she's really Jewish but was raised by parents who rejected their Judaism and she was angry about it. Some months after that, one day I come, and the door is Peninah *Levin* [not actual names]. She got very involved in kabbalah and psychology and married a Jew. I had to quit therapy after all that because I thought she was a lunatic.

Several years later I blundered into Dr. L., who turns out to be this very Jewish therapist. I've been with her for 20 years. I'm also in a group for Holocaust survivors' children. When I started with Dr. L., I wasn't engaged Jewishly, I was 90% absent. Two years later, I stumbled into a temple. Dr. L.'s client's whole life changed after that.

First, I got a life. It happened in stages. I went Friday nights for several years, then on Shabbat morning, too. It became a family for me. Look, I'm going to be frank with you. I was lost in the '90's, trying to get ahead as a high-achieving physician. Suddenly there was something more important than work. I started going to Israel regularly and got a Masters in Jewish Studies. Since my therapist's own Jewish identity was so powerful, she supported me inside and outside.

Dr. L. was also strongly feminist, and since I'm single, which is about the last thing any woman ever expects in life, I had some issues. Dr. L.'s feminist critique was life-saving. There are so many disgusting things that happen to Jewish women who never marry. I felt shameful, fearful.

Several times in my life, I had the sense that everything was inside me already, dance, astronomy, Portuguese, but I had to learn the names. I had that sense about Jewish knowledge. When I started being driven by the Jewish calendar, my therapist showed me that you think about the holiday, you have to plan for it. When I hosted my first seder, she talked me through the Jewish content and took it for granted, "Yes, of course!"—which was very beautiful. She thinks I'm a *part* of this. This strengthened my identity as a person, not just a Jew. Like a parent, she came to my bat mitzvah and accepted me as a seasoned player.

A friend of mine had a Jewish therapist who questioned her, when she got more Jewishly engaged, *did she lose her way*. I don't keep kosher, I have no yearning to be religious, but I experienced unconscious movement that was so positive.

Not long ago, on the *bimah*, I thanked Dr. L. by name. It was a very courageous and brave thing to say it to the community. I talked about not knowing my parents' story, the shame I feel about that; about not knowing how to be a Jew. People ran up to me in the street because they identified. You learn not to ask, and then you learn not to know. I could not have connected to my Judaism one day sooner than I did, because of the massive *Sturm und Drang* that I came

For many years I saw this psychiatrist who had a German-sounding first name, maybe a German last name; he was very formal, with high boundaries, closed off, and he sat way the hell on the other side of the room. I'd have fantasies about him being a Nazi. He used to open his home-office door and then put on his suit jacket.

One day I go and, oh my God, there's a menorah in the window! My shrink's a Jew. *My internal process shifted after that. I saw him as more like me; maybe he wasn't such a frightening Other; he was a* known *Other. His being Jewish let me talk more about his distance; it felt more profound. I was more in touch with my yearning, my wish for us to know each other, to have a shared experience. If he wasn't a Nazi, why was he so fucking closed off, why did he sit in* yenemsvelt, *a thousand miles away? Who does that? Maybe a* yekkie.

After that, I was free to realize we were a terrible match.

ANONYMOUS, PSYCHIATRIST, TORONTO*

*As told to Susan Schnur; edited and condensed.

from. Unconsciously, it was all there—I had a famous grandfather, a rabbi, who died in Europe—but it had been pushed aside.

I developed a bond with a therapist who recognized the meaning of Judaism in my life and that changed everything.

If You're a Person, You Ask Questions

LOIS BRAVERMAN, SOCIAL WORKER*

Living in Iowa for 32 years, I had no sense at all of psychotherapy as a Jewish field. I chose social work as a feminist; both emphasize the need to understand *context*: how community, poverty and patriarchy impact one's relationships and mental health. I cared that social work was a field historically dominated by women, that the field's foremothers believed that case-workers' unconditional regard for their clients was essential for change. I loved that Carl Rogers was a student of these women.

In Iowa, I would tell my students that it was good for a Protestant family to see a Jewish therapist, it brought out more of an emotional life, and that Protestant therapists had the advantage of calming things down more quickly.

As a Jew, I felt well-suited to the difficult and core therapeutic skill of asking questions. The Passover seder taught me about being a Jew: that if you're a person, you ask questions; that everything has multiple answers; that everyone thinks their view is legitimate and correct; that strong exchanges, arguing your point of view, is good. I liked Judaism's intrinsic validation of different people's meaning systems, its emphasis on what something means to every single person at the table—to *you* and to *you* and to *you*. ■

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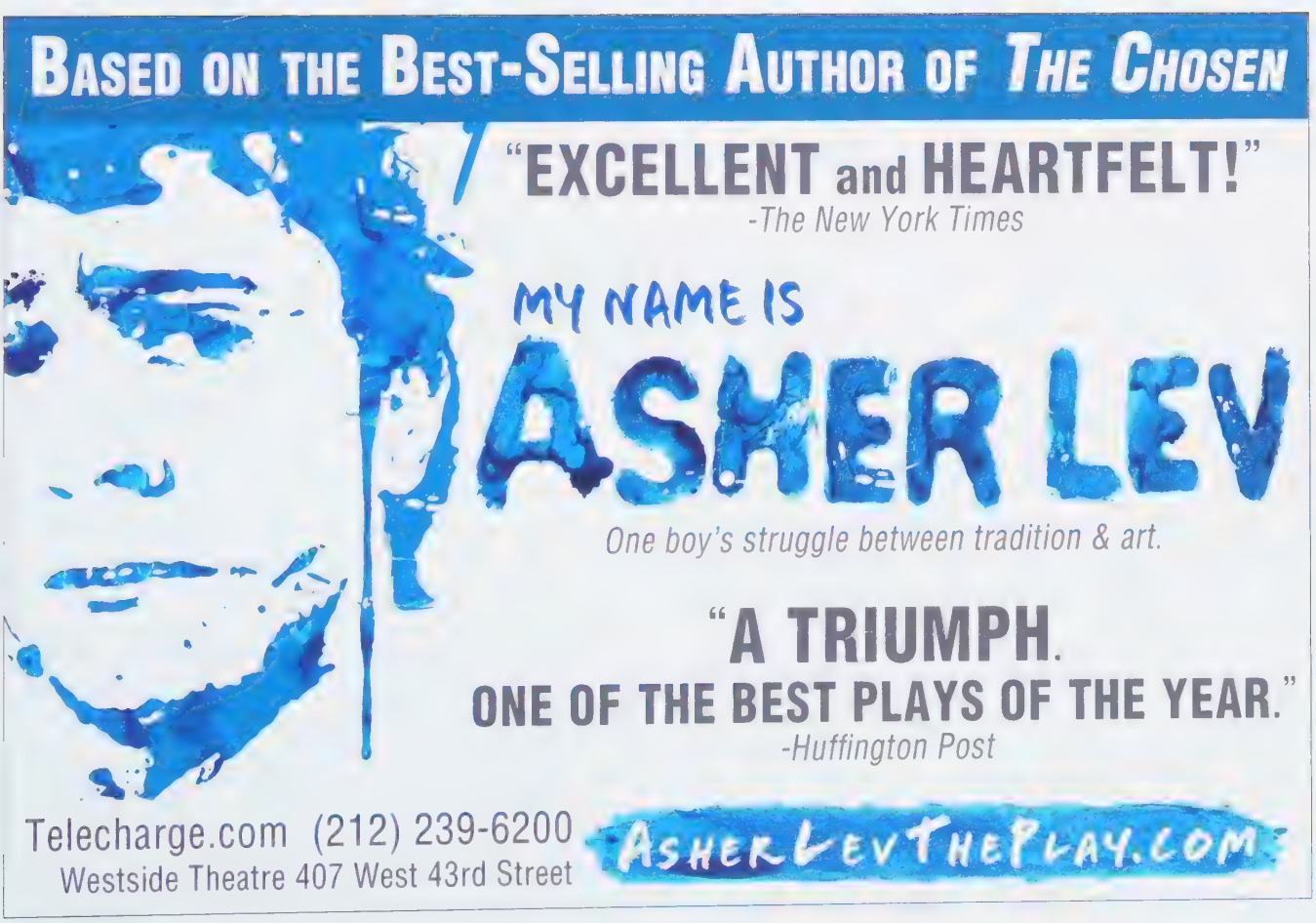
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How The Blumenfelds Lost Their Women

A Family's Roots Journey to Latvia

by DEBORAH HERTZ

Last August I went to pray at the lavishly restored Riga synagogue in Latvia. But instead of thinking about Judaism or the Holocaust or my vanished ancestors, I found myself sitting in the upstairs women's gallery feeling enraged. My neck hurt from craning to see the *davvening* downstairs, the men strutting around and chatting, while around me a quiet handful of women sat glued to their prayer books.

I was on a family roots trip in search of traces of my great-grandfather David who had left the town of Tukums in 1883 at age 20. Like many roots trips, ours was comprised of a somewhat scattershot set of relatives. There were five of us: myself, my brother Fred, his non-Jewish partner Randolph, our cousin Sean—all in ripe middle age—and my son Noah, in his twenties. Fred, Noah and myself were raised in a "thick" Jewish family culture; Randolph had a long familiarity with, and appreciation for, Judaism; our cousin Sean had never set foot in a synagogue and had been raised Episcopalian.

While Sean sat through the service like an anthropologist observing an exotic species, my brother Fred was altogether in his element, thrilled when he was offered an aliyah. As Fred ascended to the *bimah*, though, I could hardly restrain myself from striding downstairs, donning my own *tallit*, and joining him in the blessings. Here we were in 2012, almost a century and a half after our great-grandfather left Latvia, stuck back in the patriarchal Judaism already reformed in his day! Indeed, my own great-grandmother, from another branch of the family tree, had helped found a Conservative synagogue in St. Paul in 1912—precisely because she refused to pray in a women's gallery. Aghast at the situation, I somehow managed to stay seated, but I was deeply troubled.

Unlike many Jewish immigrants who arrived in New York City and settled on the Lower East Side, my great-grandfather David and his siblings moved immediately to the Midwest. In 1887, David married Lena, also a Jewish immigrant, and they settled in South St. Paul, which David sourly described in his diary as "a real frontier town" with muddy streets and an "awful stench from the cattle pens."

With his meager capital, David opened a men's clothing store that sold denim jeans and cowboy hats to locals working in the meat-packing industry. While his son Albert (my grandfather) manned the shop, David sat in a back-room study, translating the Hebrew Bible and writing several novels in stilted English. Alas, only one of them was published, by a vanity press. David became a pillar of South St. Paul civil society and played a key role in founding St. Paul's enduring Jewish institutions. Besides my grandfather, David and Lena had three other children: my great-aunts Helen and Belle—the protagonists of my story—and my great-uncle Joseph.

Our week in Latvia was the culmination of four years of family conversations about David's diary, which Sean had discovered, to our astonishment, in his Seattle basement in 2008. None of us had suspected there was such a document, and we were excited. There was a longstanding breach in our extended family; the Christian and Jewish sides had been estranged for as long as any of us remembered, and the cousins in my generation were scarcely aware of one another. We also no longer knew the origin of the rift. The diary not only clarified this for us, but did a good deal more. As we all read and talked about the journal, emailing back and forth, as Sean traveled to Minnesota to meet the Jewish side of the clan, and as some of us finally made the trip to Latvia, the diary sparked a process of extended family therapy and unexpected healing.

For me, reading the diary had a two-pronged effect. It made a kind of spooky sense out of my layered, somewhat complicated relationship to Judaism over the years, and it also offered a canny back-story to my passions as an academic. For the past 33 years, as a professor of German and Jewish history at SUNY Binghamton, Sarah Lawrence, and now at the University of California at San Diego, I have written about mistreated Jewish daughters and how they constructed new identities after rejecting their tradition. Little had I known that a deep, unsutured rupture in my own family's history had in some way propelled me.

The diary introduces us to David, a patriarch not always likeable, who could be rigidly judgmental and rejecting. Throughout the journal, David pours out his unhappiness with his wife Lena,

I inherited the double legacy of my great-aunts, the rebellious Helen (right) and the dutiful Belle (left) – a polarization that has resonated through my scholarship and life.

ART COURTESY OF THE HERTZ/BENTLEY FAMILY

but he's even nastier when it comes to his daughter Helen, my cousin Sean's grandmother. Helen was just "born with a mean disposition and a bad temper," David writes, a theory endorsed, he adds gratuitously, by the family physician. When one of Helen's teachers complains about his refusal to support his daughter's "intellectual career," David is scornful and misogynistic. "Those women who go out and do things on their own are freaks," he says. "No one has any use for them."

As the years pass, David notes that Helen, who seems to be spirited and wants to be an actress, is disobedient and mercurial, "with a talent," he notes sarcastically, "for getting mixed up with curious crowds." When she finally runs away (at this point I was rooting for her) to follow a leftist Jewish boyfriend to Trenton, New Jersey, David rejects his daughter's future husband as a "most impenetrable youth" who has nothing "to indicate him worthy of trust or friendship." David mocks his son-in-law's politics and demeans Helen's interests and artistic passions. Needless to say, Helen and her husband move to Los Angeles, far from the family fold. The diary ends before Helen's daughter Beth (who will become Sean's mother) grows up and strays even further. Beth marries a Methodist professor of poetry, becomes a poet of some renown herself, and the two convert to Episcopalianism. They raise their children in Seattle.

But then, aha!, there is David's other daughter Belle, his first-born, the one who can do no wrong. David adores her, praising her lavishly for her "discretion, alert humor, vivacity of face and manners." He also endorses her choices, noting that she "always moved in good company." When, in 1906, Belle wins the local debate championship for her high school, David swells with pride. Belle is "feted to the limit," he boasts.

David approves of this daughter's marriage—to a well-paid, studious, Jewish accountant. Belle and her husband stay in St. Paul, where she reads The New York Times daily and becomes the "much feared" president of the local chapter of Hadassah. As the years pass, Belle begins to function as an "intellectual mother" to my own mother, strongly encouraging her to return to college after we children are old enough for school. My great-aunt Belle passes on to my mother a passion for Jewish institutions and for higher education.

My great-grandfather's crudely dichotomized portraits of his daughters were painful to read, but they were also illuminating. Without in any way knowing it, I'd indeed inherited the double legacy of my great-aunts, the rebellious Helen and the dutiful Belle, a polarization that has resonated through my life.

The lavishly restored Peitav Shul in Riga, Latvia.

As a teen and young adult, I was a lot like Helen, furious at the familial expectation that I would automatically move into the roles of good Jewish daughter, good Jewish wife, and good Jewish mother. But I was also a lot like Belle. I had, after all, happily attended Hebrew High School, and I spent my summers joyfully at Camp Herzl and Camp Ramah, both in Wisconsin. I chose to go to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for my junior year abroad, and it was there, I think, that I first learned how to integrate these two aspects of myself, to heal what I now see as the Helen-Belle split.

I have to laugh retrospectively at my decision to get a doctorate in German history, which, in the early 1970s, was definitely a "Helen" move, a choice that my family experienced as insubordinate and endangering to my Jewish identity. I went to Germany to learn the language and mix with "actual" Germans; that was Helen all the way. On the other hand, my marriage, my motherhood, my adult academic and Jewish communal commitments…these are triumphs of Belle.

Most shocking to me, though, when I first read through my great-grandfather's diary, was how the core focus of the books I've written is presaged by the relationship between David and his daughter Helen. I write about angry, controlling Jewish fathers and how the outrage they commit on their daughters push the daughters to leave their families and faith. My first book, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin*, about eighteenth-century Jewish *salonieres*, addressed how Jewish daughters, forced into arranged marriages, ultimately rejected Judaism. The book I am currently working on, *Fugitive Virgins: Jewish Women Firebrands and the Movements They Joined*, again looks at arranged marriages, but this time I follow young women who've been propelled into leftist politics. Helen lives on in my scholarship!

"Those women who go out and do things on their own are freaks," my great-grandfather wrote. "No one has any use for them."

The reason my Shabbat in the synagogue in Riga was so distressing to me was that it simultaneously invigorated both prototypes: Aunt Belle knew all the prayers, as I did, but Aunt Helen, discriminated against as a female, wanted to flee the shul altogether and never look back. In the contemporary United States, there are non-Orthodox options for Jewish women; they don't have to feel split between "Helen" and "Belle." But in Riga, I found myself trapped, in a situation that I typically encounter only in history books.

During our roots trip, all five of us were living in two worlds. In our hearts and minds, we were re-enacting the complicated web of our family history, but we were also intensely aware that, to the Latvians we encountered, our search for a vanished family history appeared quixotic and sentimental. Even though my brother's research uncovered the fact that seven of our eight great-grandparents were born in the various Baltic lands, the language, the food and the scenery felt absolutely alien to us. In the same instant that we felt the ever-present ghosts of our ancestors and of those murdered by the Nazis, we felt the ghosts' "never-presence" to the Latvians we met. We also felt somewhat Jewishly inauthentic; many Jews go on roots trips to uncover family members' experience in the 1930s and '40s, but our family tree was largely severed from Latvia in 1883.

While we were still in Riga, my brother Fred checked the *Yad Vashem* Holocaust data bank on the Web to see if he could track down the fate of one of my great-grandfather's uncles, who was 87 in 1941. In minutes he discovered that he'd been murdered, along with many other Jews, during that bloody summer. How many times, I thought, had I shown my lecture class the map of the routes of the killing squads, unaware that one of my relatives was among the dead?

In the 1880s and 1890s, while he was a young impoverished tailor in the U.S., my great-grandfather David Blumenfeld had been the unlucky one of his clan. In 1941, though, he was 59, living in America, proud of what he had wrought since leav-

PHOTOS BY RANDOLPH LANGENBACH

ing Tukums. His youngest son was a graduate of Harvard Law School and soon to be appointed an assistant federal prosecutor. Oh, how the tables had turned.

Our day in Tukums was the highlight of our trip. We knew that after my great-grandfather, his parents, and his siblings departed the town, my great-grandfather's mother's family, the Klatzovs, continued to manage the family businesses, making and selling leather supplies. The diary had told us that the Klatzovs were one of the most prominent Jewish families in town, and it placed one of their shops on the central square.

We also readily identified the home of my great-great-grandmother; indeed, her house was featured on postcards of Tukums for sale in the local museum. We met with Agrita Ozola, the director of the local history museum, whose eyes opened wide as my brother showed her photos of our great-grandfather in South St. Paul and ship records of his emigration. Soon the entire diary was on her flash drive. And after visiting the local Jewish cemetery, we began planning how to work with local teenagers to restore the gravestones.

Like many Jews who do family roots trips, I felt motivated by our journey to ponder our darker, less obvious motives. My great-grandfather's family departed Riga because of the harsh Russian regulation of Jewish life which I knew, from my research, had become far worse in the early 1880s. And his uncle, who remained in Latvia, was shot, undoubtedly with the help of locals who endorsed the Nazi plan of Jewish genocide. Didn't the entire history of Latvian Jews tell us to turn away, to never revisit this Jewish graveyard? Why were we doing this, and what good would our journey bring to either us or the Latvians we were meeting?

In the Baltic lands, a brief era of national autonomy was followed by two successive occupations, first the Nazis and then the Soviets, and most Latvian and Lithuanian intellectuals were fully immersed in comparisons between these two regimes. When we saw museum displays in both Riga and Vilnius that were focused on this "double genocide," there was little representation of the suffering of the local Jews.

But beyond the issue of whether or not locals were able to attend to the Jewish tragedy which had occurred in their region, I began to wonder what my great-grandfather himself would have made of our return more than a century after his departure.

Were he to rise from his grave in St. Paul and sit with us over a cup of tea, he might well remind us that nostalgia is a privilege of the securely rooted. An intellectual, he might ask whether we were appropriating the pain of those victimized in the Holocaust. After all, when we first learned about our great-great-uncle's death, we certainly weren't grieving the brutal death of a beloved relative—we hadn't even known we *had* relatives in Tukums during the Holocaust.

Were we seeking somehow to become more authentically Jewish because, look, we've discovered a relative's tragic destiny? And as an academic, I also felt troubled by how Holocaust education, to local Latvians, might seem like just one more expression of the ascendancy of the United States in post-Soviet Eastern Europe. Roots journeys, I discovered, are complicated; you can refract dozens of lenses in the course of one short week.

Still, overall, I loved our trip, and I do want to mark the Jewish history of Tukums. My unhappy hours in the Riga synagogue and my great-grandfather's diary certainly illuminated the complicated motives for the particular lens I put on Jewish women's history. I am grateful for my closer embrace of my great-aunts Helen and Belle, for my private homage to them and integration of them, and for my extended family's healing of a multi-generational rift.

But the larger point is not about me; it is about the history of Jews in Tukums and the restoration of their vanished Jewish past. Without relatives, without a thriving Jewish presence in that old town, we cling to our diary text, to derelict cemeteries, to restored synagogues, to ghosts and relics. In our own time and in their place, we seek to restore our family's past, and to blow on the embers we find in ashes.

The Jewish cemetery in Tukums, Latvia.

Deborah Hertz is Herman Wouk chair in Modern Jewish Studies and professor of History at the University of California at San Diego. She is the author of How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin *(Yale, 2007), among other publications.*

The Locked Garden

fiction by GALIT DAHAN CARLIBACH, *translated by* ILANA KURSHAN

My grandmother, my *Savta*, is what is known as a colorful woman. There are many elements that contribute to her colorfulness: black shawls draped over her body like witches' capes; great fans with lace trims; sparkly polish decorating her sharp long nails; an oversized brass ring adorning her fourth finger; and a necklace of pearls from the Sea of Casablanca that accentuates the gleam in her eye, the gleam of one who can see into the future.

Savta's name is Sarah, a simple and down-to-earth name that hardly befits her mischievous nature. The name of her twin sister who died, Zahara, suits her much better.

The walls in our home are mostly bare, but Zahara's photo hangs in the hallway, and her eyes follow anyone who passes by.

She is a woman whose splendor is apparent even in black-and-white. Her photo is staged, with Zahara leaning against some sort of wall as if to minimize her height, which was considered "unacceptable" over there. She directs her eyes to the camera. At the bottom of the photo, just above her shoes, a peeling sticker bears the French name Elias.

"The best photographer in Casablanca," Savta would tell us. In the photo Zahara is wearing white heeled shoes and a hand-embroidered caftan. On good days, Savta showcases Zahara's

"MOTION #3," JEAN HEARST, JEANHEARST.COM

wardrobe. Her shoes are too big and she had to send a caftan to a seamstress to shorten, but she prances around in them like a Berber queen.

My twin sister Effie and I grew up with this photo. If there were any other photos of Zahara, we never found a trace of them. But the more we examined this one, the more details we discovered. For instance, Zahara's delicate skin. She had skin as thin and wrinkled as silk, which according to Savta was the source of her strength. Savta would direct our gaze: "No, look around her body," she would tell us. "Don't look too hard." Slowly we learned to let our eyes hover over the photo, and indeed, after a few minutes of staring, a sparkling halo would envelop Zahara's body. Her eyes would extend towards us, as if confined only by the frame of the photo, and as we continued to stare, her strange gaze began to appear hollow. Aside from a small mole underneath her right eye, there was no resemblance whatsoever between the two sisters.

Savta would insist upon our absolute admiration for Zahara. "Tell me, is she beautiful or is she beautiful?"

Even in the black-and-white photos, Zahara's splendor was apparent. Effie resembles her. But the two of us, well-trained, would shake our heads. "No, what's so beautiful about her?" We knew that Savta was preparing to tell a story, and there was no point in trying to stop her.

Effie would ask, "What did she die of?" And Savta would answer, "Of witchcraft." And she would add, "Zahara did not know how to deal with demons."

"Who knows how to deal with demons?" I would inquire.

And Savta, the knowing expert, would pound her fists on her chest and declare, "I do."

The story never changed. Savta has several stories that rise like dough each time she retells them, but not this one.

Zahara and Sarah were born in a village. "Next to Kativa," she rebuked Effie when she opened an atlas. "You'll never find it, because it's such a small village that if it were to appear on a map, your eyes would have to pop out of their sockets to see it. Even the king never reached it to collect taxes."

She continued, "Everyone loved her, except for me. I knew her dark side. Everyone called her the Miziyana."

And here, Savta would stop and give her audience a chance to confess that we did not understand. "Miziyana?"

"Beautiful one. But I know that she was as terrible as she was beautiful. She left me to do all the dirty work. We would walk to the river to fill up jugs of water, and I would carry the jug the whole way, like this, on my head," she demonstrated. "She would always run off just before we got to the river."

At this point, Savta would pause to give us a lesson in geography. "The river was very wide. Just before the river was a spring where we used to fill our jugs with water, next to a blossoming almond tree that never had any almonds. We were forbidden to go alone to the spring, because all sorts of bad things happened there. But Zahara would wait for me to bend down to fill the jug, and then she would suddenly disappear. She would always run off and leave me to fill the jug by myself. And it was not a small jug either; it was this big." Savta would point to the full depth of the space in which we were sitting.

"This big?" Effie would gape.

"OK, maybe a little smaller," she would concede, and then continue. "Once I left the jug next to the river and followed her. Zahara dug in the earth and took out something shiny as a coin. At that moment, her face twisted into a strange contortion."

The story never changed. Savta has several stories that rise like dough each time she retells them, but not this one.

She would sigh and go on, "Miziroba. Black-face. All the Miziyana couldn't help her. One needs to know how to conduct oneself in the presence of demons."

And then she would sit quietly for a few minutes. We would absorb what she had told us, each in her own way. My mother, who often joined us, would fix her gaze somewhere on the ceiling, and I would be seized by a sudden chill, as if the cold water from the jug had been poured right on to my head. And Effie—it was always Effie—would ask, "But what did she die of?"

"I told you," Savta would say, increasingly impatient. "Of witchcraft. Demons, like humans, love gold. They won't come politely and say: Excuse me please, can I have a bit of gold?"

"But what caused her face to contort?" I would ask. Savta would sigh, turning her gaze as if invoking some invisible presence to explain to her hopelessly uncomprehending granddaughters.

"How can I explain it? It was like lightning struck her face."

Effie would knowingly ask, "Maybe she was bitten by a snake? Snakebites are known to turn the skin black."

But Savta was insistent. "She died of magic. That's what it was. Not a snake and not a scorpion."

After that, she ran and called her father.

"At first he yelled at me and asked me where the water was. I tried to explain to him about Zahara, but he kept repeating, "Where's the water?" Then, when he realized that something had happened to his Miziyana, he abandoned everything and came with me."

Savta would pause for a dramatic intake of breath and then continue with an expression of contentment, "And there was Zahara, thrown upon the ground. Her face was black and hard, and all of her Miziyana was gone. And I understood that I had an important role to play. They had chosen me, but I knew that in order to succeed, I would need her name. And so I stole it."

The notion that our Savta was chosen, and that we, as her granddaughters, were by extension also chosen, sparked our imaginations. Effie would insist that Savta explain what role exactly she was chosen for, and in which world; but this was where the story ended. Savta never agreed to elaborate on the

nature of the important task for which she was destined.

In our room or in the kitchen, in the living room or on the roof, the story was always the same; each time, it was only the atmosphere that varied slightly. In the basement, when darkness enveloped us like a thick blanket, we felt suffocated. The long limbs of the story reached out and seized us from the four walls of the basement. On the roof, at night, the pale light of the moon beamed forth from among the clouds and penetrated our hearts. Always we would sit and listen and plead with Savta to continue. But a good storyteller knows not just how to tell a story, but also when to stop.

Savta believes fervently in the underworld. She knows how to handle demons, and every so often she invites Lilith to our home. We have yet to meet Lilith, but Savta promises that the day will come; in the meantime, she trains us to perform magic in the basement. The basement is cold and dark, with only a few lights illuminating the space. The walls are of uneven texture, and we sit on the floor on a colorful rug.

Savta pours dust into a bowl. The dust is gray and smells of talc, and its composition varies each time. Generally it is made up of the ground bones of birds.

"This dust is very expensive," Savta emphasizes. "It is leftover from the market in Kativa." She pours in a liquid that looks like carbonated water. When the batter rises, she turns to the window, sighs, and mumbles under her breath.

Savta holds on to Effie—it is always Effie—and with her free hand, she holds the bowl and spins it around on top of my head and Mother's head. We stand there with serious expressions on our faces and wait to see what will happen.

Nothing happens. At least not immediately.

But sometime after the ritual is concluded, someone's luck changes for the better. We are accepted to a new school. Or I get a job offer. Or Mother returns home with a more cheerful look on her face. Or Effie finds meaning in one of the many self-actualization workshops she attends.

"What does Lilith look like?" Effie or I would inquire.

And Savta would answer, "She is very pretty. And red. But her appearance changes. You can identify her only by her legs. She has chicken legs. Lilith loves nice legs. That's how it is; everyone loves what they don't have. But with Lilith, you really must be careful. Anyone who spends too much time with her risks losing one of three things: Sight, sons, or a spouse.

"What about you?" we would inquire, worried.

"Me?" She would laugh and wave her hand dismissively. "I already voluntarily gave up on two of the three. Lilith doesn't need to do me any favors."

Sight, we'd think. That explains the hollow look in Zahara's eyes.

With every fabric of her being, Savta despises Ashmedai, the male counterpart to Lilith.

"He is a man disguised as a demon," she explains. She forbids us even to speak his name. As if we had nothing better to do all day, Effie and I, than to summon Ashmedai.

The brass ring on Savta's finger belonged to her husband, and with it one could defeat any man. This talisman is wasted on her.

Aside from Lilith, Savta also has dealings with holy men. If there are men who can come to her aid, then why not, she reasons. The ancient rabbis—our sages of blessed memory—are often the objects of her harassment.

Rabbi Shimon is summoned nearly every day: When a loaf of bread burns, when the chicken dries out in the oven, when beet juice splashes on the wall—as invariably happens when Savta tries her hand at anything in the kitchen.

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Rabbi Meir, master of miracles, is one rank above Rabbi Shimon. He is summoned in times of trial, when money is tight or someone is in need of assistance.

Rabbi Akiva is summoned only as a last resort.

Savta wants us to be religious. Our monastic life allows for a close connection with the Holy One Blessed Be He. Given that there are no men in our lives, we observe the dictum that "the honor of the king's daughter is within." The television is always broken anyway. Moreover, a woman who can sort beans can surely master the art of keeping separate dishes. And is it really so much to ask of one who summons demons to keep the Sabbath? Savta lectures us on the prohibition on kindling fire on the Sabbath: "Fire and water are very dangerous elements. There are days when it is best not to light a match." But every Friday night the smoke from her cigarettes filters down the stairwell. Savta smokes thin "Vogue" cigarettes through pursed lips, and God is so afraid of her that He overlooks her offense. And not just God. The entire underworld is afraid of Savta, to the extent that there are no voices of protest when she cuts her fingernails at night.

But every Friday night Savta smokes thin "Vogue" cigarettes through pursed lips, and God is so afraid of her that He overlooks her offense. And not just God. The entire underworld is afraid of Savta.

"Would you want someone to throw dirty fingernails on your head?" Savta would rebuke Effie, who would always make a point of cutting her fingernails at night. "The night is their time."

I never had a problem with this. I am a professional nailbiter. As soon as a millimeter of nail grows, I bite it off with my teeth.

Effie would grumble, "What is the difference between night and day?"

And Savta would respond angrily, "I already explained it to you. At night the demons rule. That is how God ordained it, so that we would not get in each other's way. Your fingernails contain all the material that comprises your being. Would you want them to use your fingernails to create another Effie?"

And I would think, "to create another Effie," "to create another Talush." These were the magic words that explained the phenomenon of duplication.

Savta taught us that everyone has a shade, a sort of reflected image. "Sometimes they go out to wander, and then," she cautioned, "it is very important not to relate to them. Demons are like dogs. They can smell fear."

The shades were our greatest terror: the notion that we might meet someone identical to ourselves, and that someone might get confused and send us—instead of the double—into the bowels of the earth, and from there to flow through the disgusting sewer pipes. From the bowels of the earth one had to run terrible errands: kidnapping children in their sleep, seducing married men, drowning girls in sewers. At night, we were especially terrified of encountering our shades, and so we never went to the bathroom alone.

Across from the bathroom hung a great mirror, which was the source of much debate. Was it better to pee with the bathroom door open, but thereby risk glimpsing ourselves in the mirror? Or was it better to close the door, so that the silence would close in on us? Ultimately, with time, we found a solution. One of us would pee with the door open, with the other standing with her back to the mirror, and the third person, generally Mother, would stand guard in the hallway.

Meanwhile, Savta would sleep peacefully upstairs. She was never afraid to go to the bathroom at any time of day or night.

We were also forbidden to pour boiling water into the sink. There was no problem with pouring sulfuric acid to unclog the drain, but boiling water was strictly off limits.

"To pour boiling water on those below can lead only to trouble," Savta would declare.

But all the while, she would cut her nails freely and pour water down the drain with abandon and peer endlessly at her reflection in the mirror, and the creatures of the underworld would observe without objection, as usual.

Savta had her own private entrance, which would have made our lives a bit more comfortable, except that she never used it.

Next to this door was a ladder which we used to climb up to the roof of our home. The ladder annoyed Savta. "Why do you leave a ladder there?" she would criticize my mother. "Why not just offer the robbers food and set out a welcome mat?"

"What is there to steal?" Mother would ask each time anew.

In the winter we would gather in the living room, the red carpet spread out before us.

"With this carpet," Savta would narrate, "my family arrived at the village. Before then, in Cera, a Muslim man fell in love with Zahara. To prevent him from kidnapping her, we all sat on this carpet, took off, and landed in the village."

"But there isn't enough room on this carpet," Effie objected. Mother, in one of her rare interjections, responded, "That's what bothers you, that there wasn't enough room? What about the fact that the carpet could fly?" ■

From The Locked Garden *by Galit Dahan Carlibach.© 2010 by Galit Dahan Carlibach. Published in Hebrew by Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir–Publishing House. Translated and printed with permission of the author.*

Galit Dahan Carlibach, born in Sderot, lives with her husband and two children in Jerusalem, where she works as a writer and tour guide.

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A Jewish Mother *on the* Boy Scouts

by HEIDI GRALLA

When Boy Scouts of America announced this past summer that it was reaffirming its policy banning participation by gays and lesbians, it caught a lot of parents by surprise.

I was one of those parents. My seven-year-old, Joshua, had just spent a wonderful year as a Cub Scout, a year filled with a firehouse tour, family scrapbooking, bike repair, nature walks, winter camping with my husband, and other memorable activities. I knew when I'd signed him up for Cub Scouts that their national organization, Boy Scouts of America, had a reputation for being homophobic, but there was no evidence of that in my progressive little community, and it never occurred to me that it was actually written into the B.S.A.'s by-laws.

But there it was: "While the B.S.A. does not proactively inquire about the sexual orientation of employees, volunteers or members, we do not grant membership to individuals who are open or avowed homosexuals or who engage in behavior that would become a distraction to the mission of the B.S.A."

This was especially surprising to me because Girl Scouts, to which my daughter has belonged for years, has a policy of inclusiveness, stated in an official blog post this July: "Girl Scouts of the USA and its local councils and troops value diversity and inclusiveness and do not discriminate or recruit on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, national origin, or physical or developmental disability."

The Boy Scouts' policy, which B.S.A. officials said was the result of an internal, two-year study, touched off a storm of protest. There have been online petitions and letter-writing campaigns from within and outside the scouting world. One petition, on behalf of a high school senior who was denied his Eagle Scout award after coming out as gay, drew more than 400,000 supporters, including numerous Eagle Scouts who said the boy could have their award.

In my community, the response was divided. At least seven families and three leaders left scouting. But many parents opted to continue their involvement, believing that the value

PHOTO CREDIT: "NORMAL ROCKWELL" BY DEFIAM, W

Anti-Gay Policy

of the program outweighed a bad policy. Not me. As a Jew, a descendant of a people that has endured so much hatred and discrimination, it just felt wrong. Even though no one intended to enforce the policy locally, a percentage of every scout's membership dues and proceeds from purchases of Cub Scout supplies go to the national offices of Boy Scouts of America. The organization's name is embroidered on my son's uniform. What if it had been some other group that was being excluded, like Jews or Christians or Muslims or Hindus? Would families still be willing to look the other way?

This policy of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is clearly a troubling social justice issue for Jewish scouting groups to consider, but they have a long history invested with the Boy Scouts of America. The first Jewish Boy Scout troop was founded in 1913 at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. By 1957, there were 1,367 troops chartered to Jewish religious and fraternal organizations, according to the National Jewish Committee on Scouting, an advisory committee to the B.S.A. As of last year, there were roughly 160 Jewish-affiliated Cub Scout/Boy Scout/Venturing groups serving nearly 4,000 boys, and those numbers have remained fairly stable in recent years, according to the B.S.A.

If it had been some other group that was being excluded, would families still be willing to look the other way?

Dr. Marc Kramer, Executive Director of RAVSAK, a network of Jewish community day schools, has fond memories of his days as a Cub Scout, but he would not encourage a Jewish school to sponsor a scout group, nor would he enroll his son in one. "We, as a Jewish community, have a history of standing up when there's a gap between what's legal and what's right," said Kramer, a gay parent of three children. Schools and other organizations that sponsor scouting activities should match their actions with their values, he explained. "If the Boy Scouts were to make a policy that they were allowed to exclude folks with disabilities there would be no school, church or synagogue in America that would continue to align itself with the Boy Scouts."

Though some Jewish organizations and rabbis have continued their involvement with scouting, others have not. In New Orleans, the Boy Scouts run an annual fall event called The Ten Commandments Walk, during which scouts spend a day visiting 10 different religious institutions, including a several synagogues that have participated for years. This year, in response to the B.S.A.'s re-affirmation of its anti-gay policy, most synagogues and Jewish organizations in New Orleans declined to host the scouts, said Alexis Berk, rabbi at Touro Synagogue, a longtime participant in the program. Just as we teach our children about the civil rights struggles of the '60s, Berk believes our children will one day teach their children about the gay rights movement. "I want to be on the right side of this," she said. "[The B.S.A's policy] is pure bigotry."

This isn't the first time this issue has been in the spotlight. In 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the B.S.A.'s right as a private organization to exclude gays and lesbians, sparking a wave of protests, including many by Jewish organizations that sponsor scouting groups. One of those was Congregation Emanu El in Houston. Uncomfortable with the policy, the temple board considered disbanding their boy scouting program, but decided instead to send a letter to officials at Boys Scouts of America letting them know the temple disagreed with the policy and didn't intend to enforce it. "We never heard back, so we felt we were on record that this is what we were doing," said Lisa Stone, a founder of the temple's Boy Scout program. To further promote its opposition to the policy, her troop also ran a workshop at that time for scouts and their families focusing on discrimination against gays and lesbians, particularly in scouting. The troop has continued to ignore the B.S.A.'s policy, she said.

Stone, who now serves as chair of the Houston Jewish Scouting Committee, encourages scouting families to send letters and petitions protesting the policy. Like many others involved in scouting, she believes the policy will eventually be dropped.

I'm hoping that happens soon enough for my son to return to scouting. Meanwhile, I pondered for days last fall how to explain to Joshua that he wasn't going to be a Cub Scout anymore. It turned out to be much easier than I thought. As we drove past a scouting recruitment sign one afternoon, Joshua asked whether he would be returning to Cub Scouts this year. I started to explain why he wasn't, but he interrupted and said his friends Michael and Alexander weren't going back either. I asked him if he knew why. "Well," he said, "Cub Scouts is saying that some people can't join which isn't fair to them." He never even asked which people couldn't join. I like to think it's because he knows it doesn't matter. ■

Heidi Gralla lives in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, with her husband and three children.

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A LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER

Dear Daughter,

When the world tries to pry your fingers from the slippery rim of your own instinct remember you are here to teach as well as learn. Do not be timid. Grow tall as redwoods, fierce as a shark, and carry a wide ocean heart. Howl when you must. Peel onions and cry, examine thoughts that rattle your skull. Dust underneath your bed. If you have to be sick, make sure the toilets are not clogged, nor the sink overflowing. Remember your ancestors, hold their stories in your hands like stones, sink into your gut and let it quiver, like your granddad's fingers as he lights his pipe. Suck an orange, roll out a pie crust of clear intentions, trim your bangs, hunker down, tell a lie, bare your fangs, bite down hard on the fleshy arm that holds its hand over your mouth—but do not be surprised to find it is your own. Bleed and swell, welcome coins and consciousness. Fly south with the geese, take your place at the front of the formation; make it easier for those behind you. Dust your hiking boots, hit the trail, fret not over wind erasing your footprints. Even as you stumble, cough and curse, know you are headed in the right direction—right and wrong are pancakes easily flipped. Bake an angel. Blow out candles, become a year wiser. Feast! Invite guests or dine alone. Sweep for the untidy, wail for the orphans, beat pillows, curl your eyelashes and cry your mascara onto canvas. Life is an abstract impressionist painting: one moment a waterfall, and the next, a bolt of lightening cracking open your sky.

Yours forever,
Mama

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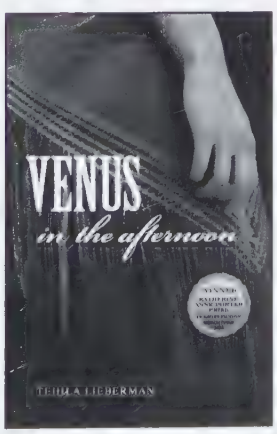

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REVIEWS

The Diary Takes on a Life of Its Own

"I am told that every night when the sun goes down, somewhere in the world the curtain is going up on the stage play made from Anne's diary," wrote Miep Gies, who helped hide Anne Frank's family during the war, in her 1980s memoir. The play, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, has been an international theater phenomenon since it opened on Broadway in 1955.

But the theatrical version of Anne Frank is only one of the countless ways that for the past 60 years people all over the world have connected with Anne Frank and her diary—the subject of the collection of essays, ***Anne Frank Unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory*** (Indiana University Press, $29) edited by **Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett** and **Jeffrey Shandler**. Fifteen years ago, when the Broadway production starring Natalie Portman was being reviewed, Cynthia Ozick, in the pages of *The New Yorker*, lamented the distortion and destruction of the diary in its contemporary incarnations—a misreading captured by the actress's interpretation of her character: "It's funny, it's hopeful, and she's a happy person," Portman said of Anne Frank. "Whence came this uplifting and genial characterization of the diary?" Ozick asked, musing, "Who owns Anne Frank?"

Anne Frank Unbound shows how far readers and artists have moved from Ozick's desire for what she saw as authentic readings of the diary. The more time elapses, the less readers feel constrained in how they respond to the diary. Otto Frank's control of the dramatic rights to his daughter's diary allowed him to request the removal, from the 1955 play, of a line in the diary where Peter Van Daan asserts that he wants to change his name and deny his Jewishness if he survives the war. It was not fair to the boy, Otto Frank felt, for his memory to be marred by such a juvenile comment.

The current panoply of cultural production surrounding Anne Frank knows no such limits in its manipulations of the diary. Take, for instance, jokes about Anne Frank. They may seem in poor taste, but they are a product of our anxieties, Eddie Portnoy explains in his essay, "Anne Frank on Crank: Comic Anxieties." It is Frank's iconic stature and the public's familiarity with the intimate details of her life that make Anne Frank such an easy target of deflationary humor, according to Portnoy. Sara Horowitz's "Literary Afterlives of Anne Frank" traces the ways that Anne Frank continues to attract writers and serve as the subject of fiction and poetry. The unfinished nature of the story, the obliqueness of its treatment of the Holocaust, and the decades of reading Anne's experience as paradigmatic of all suffering have made it a natural text for exploring new meanings. Passover is never mentioned in Anne's diary, but she has been integrated into several *hagadot*, according to Liora Gubkin's "Anne Frank, a Guest at the Seder" chapter. Frank's discussion of her sexuality and maturation inspires contemporary scholarship that treats the diary as a coming-of-age narrative, as Sally Charnow shows, replacing the older scholarly focus on the diary as a document of Jewish resistance to Nazi persecution. Jeffrey Shandler and Edna Nahshon's chapters helpfully treat the diary's transformation to book and then to the stage.

Ozick, in 1997, decried the misnomer of the diary as a Holocaust document (the crimes of the Holocaust are largely not described in this diary), or even calling it "the story of Anne Frank," because its end was missing; but current literary, visual, artistic, and musical engagements with the text are so multifarious, Shandler and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's volume reveals, precisely because the diary is unfinished. One wishes for a more finished volume than this one; after 60 years, readers justly feel the time is ripe for a more cohesive thesis about the diary's significance to Jewish culture. The last year alone has seen two works of fiction based on Anne Frank, by two of America's leading Jewish novelists, Nathan Englander and Shalom Auslander. More than ever, this diary of a young girl seems not so much "unbound" as completely bound up in our current cultural moment. It may be that we wait another 60 years for a volume that reflects back on why that is so.

More than ever, Anne Frank's *Diary* seems bound up in our current cultural moment.

RACHEL GORDAN *received her Ph.D. in American religious history from Harvard in 2012. She is a postdoctoral fellow in American Judaism at Northwestern.*

Feminine and Funny

We Killed: The Rise of Women in American Comedy by **Yael Kohen** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $27) is an entertaining and comprehensive look at its subject.

Sub-subtitled "A Very Oral History," this book reads like a documentary film. It is made up primarily of candid quotations from a wide range of comics (including Joan Rivers, Sandra Bernhard, Roseanne, Whoopi Goldberg, Jeaneane Garofolo, and Lisa Lampanelli) as well

as male and female television writers, producers, bookers, and performers. The text also contains comedic scripts and media references, like the 1968 review of Lily Tomlin's prophetic monologue about computer matchmaking. Kohen's voice is apparent in her scattered introductions and in her organizational scheme: she weaves in a massive amount of material from Phyllis Dyler Diller, Bea Arthur, Mary Tyler Moore, Margaret Cho, Chelsea Handler, and online sensations.

Kohen tackles the tiresome and yet still pertinent questions—Are women funny? Will men ever accept women as their comedic equals—not in a theoretical capacity, but empirically? The book traces gender themes, considering the roles of femininity, (a)sexuality, beauty, weight, "fuckability factor," toughness and self-deprecation on stage and backstage, and how they shifted from era to era. (Note the span from Roseanne's "A lot of people say I'm not feminine. Well, they can suck my dick" to Sarah Silverman's sex appeal.) She also points out women's roles at work; for example, that there has been no late-night female head writer since Letterman's Merill Markoe in 1988. Beyond that, the book notably relays the pivotal role that women have played in all of American humor, influencing the development of improv, Saturday Night Live and the alternative storytelling scene, and (via Mitzi Shore's Comedy Store) the rise of late-night scouting in LA. Comments about rejection and struggle abound, and Kohen's characters are inspiring and vulnerable. This is not entirely a celebratory tale.

Much of the material is not directly about gender, and concerns the comedy industry, personalities, craft, and culture. We read behind-the-scenes tales of cocaine, bulimia, and paranoia. The work traces elements of American comedy history: the rise of clubs in New York, shifts in sitcom, daytime and late-night audiences and geographical disparities (improv developed in Chicago and was frequented by academics and psychoanalysts; storytelling has Irish Boston roots). We learn how Gilda Radner wrote sketches, how Ellen's success hurt her, how Suzanne Somers rose to fame through her poetry, how SNL was the first comedy-variety show made by people who grew up watching TV, and how a 1970s CBS rep said that "There are four things that American television audiences won't accept: men with mustaches, people who live in New York, Jews, and divorce."

Three hundred pages of quotation is a lot, but the inclusion of frank "backstage chat"—by people who make a living writing funny dialogue—make this a consistently lively read. *We Killed* is a necessary project that brings together many generations of jokers to probe the role of comediennes in American culture.

JUDY BATALION's *work has appeared in Salon, the Washington Post and the Jerusalem Post, among many other publications. She edited* The Laughing Stalk: Live Comedy and Its Audiences.

Russian Bestsellers

Welcome **Ludmila Ulitskaya**, one of contemporary Russia's best-selling authors. Among her 16 books published in Russian are two novels investigating the uncomfortable intersection of ethnic identity and religious choice.

The Funeral Party (Schocken Books, $14.95, translated by Cathy Porter) is set in 1991, in the summer of the putsch that ousted Gorbachev and brought Yeltsin to power, a summer when a world was dying and it was unclear what would replace it. In a dingy apartment in Lower Manhattan, the dying artist Alik, a secular Russian Jew, is surrounded by friends, family, current and former lovers: Valentina of the celebrated breasts; Gioia, who reads Dante to him; Nina with her gold cross; Irina, circus acrobat in Russia, now a prosperous lawyer in New York—all drawn to the charisma of a man physically paralyzed, financially dependent and overlooked as an artist. Present in the crowd is a priest ready to baptize Alik before his death and a rabbi Alik has summoned to help balance the scale. The rabbi presents Alik with a choice: "You can be nobody, which I understand to mean a heathen. You could become a Jew, which you have every reason to be by virtue of your blood. Or you can become a

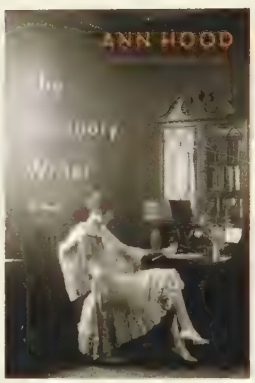
Christian, take the crumb that falls from the Jews' table." Averting any choice, Alik compels the rabbi and priest to drink together. Transcending ethnic, religious, economic, and physical boundaries to unite those around him, Alik resembles a bohemian Christ among Russians in exile.

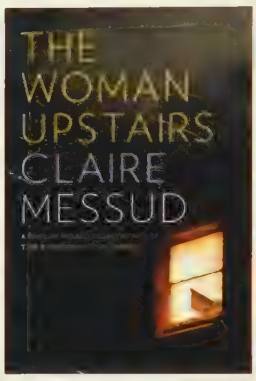
Ulitskaya's *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* (Overlook, $27.95, translated by Arch Tait) appeared almost a decade after *The Funeral Party*, and is a more elaborate meditation on a similarly universalist protagonist. Daniel Stein is a fictionalized version of Oswald ("Daniel") Rufeisen (1922-1998), who indeed lived a life worthy of a novel. Obscuring his Polish-Jewish identity, Rufeisen worked as an interpreter for the police in the town of Mir during WWII, and managed to save some 300 Jews from the ghetto liquidation. He was arrested, but escaped to a convent,

What I'm Reading Now (Notes from the Nightstand of Lilith's Book Editor)

I recently stayed up all night reading ***The Obituary Writer*** by **Ann Hood** (Norton, $26.95), a literary novel whose chapters are alternately set in Virginia in 1960, where Claire, a Jackie Kennedy-obsessed young wife and mother finds herself no longer in love with her husband Peter; and in California in 1919, where a successful obituary writer named Vivien cannot overcome the loss of her own lover in the Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. Whereas most historical novels that flash back and forth move from present to past, Ann Hood manages to vividly capture two very different epochs. Her writing is rich with period details, from the cans of green beans Claire warms in the evening for her husband's dinners to the competition among her friends to guess the color of the First Lady's dress at the next public event to her creeping sense of boredom and unease: "Looking back on that evening, Claire tried to find the beginnings of a rupture, the way they say the San Andreas fault is already cracked and over time shifts more and more until the earth finally cracks open. But she could never find even a hairline fracture. She remembers feeling satisfaction over the dull predictability of her days. If she did not feel a thrill at the sound of Peter's key in the front door each evening, she did feel a confidence, a rightness, to the way the hours presented themselves." Perhaps the greatest triumph of the novel is that by the time Hood deftly connects the two plot lines in a surprising climax, the reader has already unconsciously grasped that despite living decades and miles apart, women who grieve and seek consolation are all part of a universal narrative.

I also recently read ***The Woman Upstairs*** by **Claire Messud** (Knopf, $25.95), the story of a 37-year-old unmarried elementary school teacher named Nora in Cambridge, Massachusetts who falls in love with the family of one of her students, a Lebanese boy named Reza Shahid whose father is a visiting professor at Harvard and whose glamorous Italian mother enjoys the successful art career that Nora always dreamed of for herself. As Nora becomes close friends with Reza's mother, she re-kindles her own artistic passions, working painstakingly to create a miniature replica of Emily Dickinson's room in Amherst as she struggles with her loneliness despite—or rather because of—her room of one's own. Eventually the Shahid family returns to their home in Paris, but Nora never forgets them; ultimately this is a book about confronting the growing awareness that you may mean nothing to someone who means everything to you, and that in the face of this deeply painful inequity, there is no recourse.





And finally, on my nightstand now is **Jessica Greenbaum**'s newly published poetry collection ***The Two Yvonnes*** (Princeton, $12.95), which takes its invitingly beguiling title from the final poem in which the author confesses to misunderstanding a friend's recommendation that she read a new translation of a Gogol story called "The Two Ivans." Greenbaum finds herself repeatedly the subjects of others' flawed memories, until she begins to think herself "the second Yvonne in the new translation" and wonders, "who are you? You who I thought the star of my story?" This type of self-interrogation and attempt at self-definition permeates the collection; in "Packing Slip," she describes the contents of her self as "White, Jewish female, 5' 4 1/2", 112 lbs., brown eyes, brown hair / from hirsute tribes in Poland and Russia, Tay-Sachs positive, HIV / negative.... fallen arches from thirty years of running the streets of Roslyn / Manhattan, Houston, Brooklyn, and wherever she woke up." Several of these poems allude to Greenbaum's Jewish heritage, including one about a Passover day so warm that the speaker peels off her sweater in a celebration of freedom and a rare instance of self-forgiveness. Written with the narrative simplicity of prose and the emotional honesty of our most private moments, this collection--the first since Greenbaum's debut *Inventing Difficulty* (1998)—spends multiple decades in the author's life as a wife, mother, friend, and reader, reminding me of a comment once made to me by an editor friend: "Poets, if they are men, come out with a new collection every two years; if they are women, it's more like every ten years, because there is all that life that must be lived in between."

ILANA KURSHAN

where he converted to Catholicism before leaving to fight with the partisans. He later became a Carmelite monk while remaining a Zionist, and renounced his Polish citizenship to immigrate to Israel as a Jew. In a series of famous court cases in the 1950s and 60s, he was denied citizenship under the Right of Return on the grounds of his conversion from Judaism. He remained in Haifa, preaching largely to mixed Jewish-Catholic families from Eastern Europe and delivering Catholic Masses in Modern Hebrew.

Ulitskaya intended to translate into Russian Nechama Tec's 1990 biography of Rufeisen, *In the Lion's Den*. What emerged instead was Daniel Stein, a far looser rendition of Rufeisen's life, which unfolds through fictional documents: letters, diary entries, fragments from speeches and conversations between characters, many of whom are East European Jews who have adopted Christianity. All are seeking faith in a world where ethnicity is supposed to determine belief. Teresa, a former nun married to a Jewish-born Orthodox priest, Efim, writes proudly of her husband's congregants, "How amazed Efim was when he discovered several Jews from Russia among his new parishioners.... Two large Bedouin families also came, several Greeks, and a Japanese man married to a Russian-Israeli woman." A version of the author writes letters that appear alongside those of Daniel's other followers, in which she hints at a fear of the irreconcilability between Judaism and Christianity: "When he died it became evident that his living body had been the sole bridge between Judaism and Christianity."

Soviet Jews' identity came from discrimination, rather than from religion.

It is tempting to view Brother Daniel, like Alik in *The Funeral Party*, as a modern day Christ figure, a renegade bearing a cross formed by the awkward intersection of cultures. But Ulitskaya chooses to portray him as a translator, a master of finding new forms to express a common meaning. In this sense the book is less about Daniel than it is about the spiritual crises of East Europeans in the twentieth century, and this helps to account for its immense popularity in Russia amidst the post-Soviet enthusiasm for religious awakening.

Daniel's insistence that he is a Jew by nationality and a Christian by belief suggests that diverse peoples—Russians, Jews, Bedouins, and others—might be united by a generously interpreted belief in Christian grace. His ethnic identification as a Jew is familiar to Soviet Jews whose identity came from discrimination rather than religion. Understandably, some Jewish readers have been disturbed by the book's underlying theology—Daniel's Christianity obviates ethnic particularism. If ethnic Jewishness and religious Judaism are separate entities, is there a place for religious continuity or Jewish culture? By setting the novel in Israel, Ulitskaya suggests that neither Judaism nor Jewish culture is at risk. Still, it is difficult to read Ulitskaya's multiple conversion narratives without recalling the many forced baptisms in Russian Jewish history. Some readers are liable to form an opinion of the book before opening it, knowing that Ulitskaya, a Jew by birth, openly professes Orthodox Christianity.

Ulitskaya's novel might best be understood as an argument in favor of freedom from a religious tradition. She writes in her Afterward, "I hope my work will lead nobody astray but serve only to encourage personal responsibility in matters of life and faith."

AMELIA GLASER *is an associate professor of Russian and Comparative Literature at the University of California, San Diego.*

Hairy Legs and a Penis

Intentions, by **Deborah Heiligman** (Knopf, $16.99), is a swift, funny and profound young adult novel about 15-year-old Rachel Greenberg's first encounters with moral complexity and adult failure. Heiligmans' ability to imbue the simplicity and naiveté of a child's voice with the biting sophistication, and even wisdom, of an adult makes the book suitable for readers of all ages.

The story opens with Rachel discovering her beloved Rabbi Cohn having sex on the *bima* of their synagogue with a woman who is definitely not his wife. We then find out that what Rachel has just witnessed is not her only problem: her parents are fighting incessantly, her grandmother is battling severe dementia, her boyfriend Jake isn't telling her something, and Alexis, her best friend, has, of course, decided she's got better people to hang out with. Oh, and one more thing? That woman on the bima may have been Rachel's mother.

Rachel handles it all with humor, but at some point the moral and religious dissonance in her life catches up with her. One night, Rachel succumbs to passion at a dimly lit party and cheats on her boyfriend with the good-looking rabbi's son; the next day, after discovering Jake has cheated on her with Alexis at the same party, she frames Alexis, a serial shoplifter, for shoplifting at the mall. In these climactic scenes, Heiligman makes painfully clear how easily parental and peer identities bleed into children. Rachel's struggle is ultimately the classic young adult psychosocial struggle to tease out her own identity from surrounding ones. Only when she succeeds at this does she begin to make things right.

As Heiligman's writing style blends adolescent foolishness and adult gravitas, so do her characters: Rachel is very much a child to her parents, yet she is uniquely mature and motherly towards Randy, her illiterate seven-year-old student; Rachel's mom gives sage dating advice, yet is heart-wrenchingly still a child as she cries "Mommy! Don't go, oh no!" during her own mother's death; Rabbi Cohn vows to return from his wayward path only after Rachel and his own teenage son show him the way. As Alexis delicately puts it, the rabbi may be a rabbi, but he's also "just a guy, a man...hairy legs and a penis. Blood, guts, shit." Page in and page out, Heiligman reminds us that we are all like Russian nesting dolls—at our oldest, eternally encompassing our previous selves,

and at our youngest, already standing beside the projections of who we will one day become.

DIANE KOLATCH *is an aspiring writer in New York City.*

When Fashion Shows Made Social Change

With ***From Fashion to Politics: Hadassah and Jewish American Women in the Post World War II Era*** (Academic Studies Press, $49), **Shirli Brautbar** makes a name for herself among those revisionist scholars who show that American women of the 1950s did not languish as victims of conservative gender norms. Rather, as Brautbar and other historians have uncovered, postwar American women found numerous ways to resist the forces that would limit them to home and hearth.

In this excellent study, Brautbar carefully recounts how the women of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, worked as activists, fundraisers, lobbyists, and public relations specialists throughout the 1950s and 1960s, defying social pressures to restrict their talents to the domestic sphere. The organization, over 300,000 members strong in the postwar years, was the largest Zionist organization in America and one of the leading women's organizations in the world. Its members proved particularly adept at raising money, taking in over 15 million dollars in 1967 after the Six Days' War. The (generally unpaid) labor of these women served not only to build the infrastructure of social services in the new state of Israel, but also to support civil rights and civil liberties in the United States.

If Hadassah does not immediately strike you as a revolutionary organization (perhaps especially in light of its reticence over Anat Hoffman's October arrest after leading hundreds of Hadassah women in prayer at the Western Wall), that may be because Hadassah often used the trappings of the "feminine mystique" to achieve their activist goals. For instance, in what might be the finest chapter in the book, Brautbar analyzes the traveling fashion shows sponsored by Hadassah throughout the 1950s and 1960s. During these elaborate events, the hard-working leaders of Hadassah would strut the catwalk wearing gowns like the "Nightingale"—a gunmetal strapless taffeta dress with black velvet stripes and borders—or the "Mimosa," a wool coat with wide hip pockets and an exaggerated collar. While these fashion shows certainly valorized the beauty culture that demanded crinolined, high-heeled perfection from women in the postwar years, they also served an expressly political purpose. They featured the couture of the Alice Seligsberg Fashion Institute, an organization funded by Hadassah to train Israeli women for work in the fashion industry. And the shows raised money not only for that institute, but also for the Hadassah Hebrew University Medical Center in Jerusalem, the Hadassah Neurim Vocational Training Center for Holocaust survivors, and the Dvir Hotel School which trained young Israelis to work in their country's burgeoning tourist trade. Hadassah women, Brautbar argues, were not hobbled by the postwar beauty culture; rather, they harnessed it to become social activists and policy-makers.

Hadassah women were not hobbled by the postwar beauty culture; rather, they harnessed it to become social activists and policy-makers.

No one can read Brautbar's work without recognizing that Hadassah has too often been unfairly dismissed (regrettably even by feminist scholars) as a social club, a pointless diversion for the bored and repressed middle-class Jewish women of the postwar years. Hadassah women may have preferred to buy bras than burn them, they may have dressed in silk and pearls as they lobbied Congress and crafted the blueprint for social services in Israel. But Brautbar's book gives us ample proof that well-dressed activists can also be quite effective ones.

RACHEL KRANSON *is a professor of Modern Jewish History at the University of Pittsburgh and a contributing editor to Lilith.*

Women on the Rise

This year, as the American election rolled out its endless spin cycles of bluster and recrimination, the political scene repeatedly brought news of a "war on women" being waged in Washington. To the dismay of voters on both sides of the aisle, politicians and pundits displayed remarkable levels of vitriol towards women—from Todd Akin's now-infamous comments about "legitimate rape" to the recent wave of anti-choice laws under consideration in legislatures across America. What are engaged women to make of this development? Does it signal a country-wide reversion to pre-feminist values, a permanent regression in the fortunes of women and their place in society?

The End of Men: and the Rise of Women (Riverhead Books, $27.95) by **Hannah Rosin** is a thoughtful, nuanced portrayal of the changed and changing status of women in contemporary societies around the world. Rosin catalogues a quiet—yet irreversible—revolution in women's roles and fortunes. Drawing on a range of sources, from the academic to the anecdotal, she paints a compelling portrait of a world in which women have adapted to suit a rapidly changing environment. At the heart of her thesis is the notion of the "Plastic Woman": over the course of the twentieth century, women have performed "superhuman feats of flexibility," going from "barely working at all to working only until [they] got married and then working with children, even babies" in just a few decades. From Alabama to Korea to Sweden, women have become the driving force of local and national economies. This has had consequences ranging from women's astonishing takeover of the profession of pharmacy—while 8% of phar-

macists were women in 1960, the number is close to 60% today—to the meteoric rise of women in the Korean workforce.

The counterpart to the "Plastic Woman" Rosin writes about is the "Cardboard Man"; compared to women, men have shown a comparative inability to adapt to changing times. In Rosin's canny analysis, men are "stuck"; while women display "Napoleonic" appetites, "gobbl[ing] up new territory" in the social and economic spheres, men remain tied to a shrinking set of options, unable—or unwilling—to expand into roles demarcated as feminine. This has resulted in a radical change in the domestic sphere, as women, especially in the middle and lower classes, opt to "marry down" or eschew marriage entirely in the absence of acceptable matrimonial prospects. Rosin examines these phenomena with a lens that veers from intimate portraits of individual women to analysis of a broad range of statistics, but her steady, eloquent prose renders *The End of Men* a consistently fascinating read.

Unlike feminist writers of a previous era, such as Betty Friedan and Shulamith Firestone, Rosin does not prescribe a plan of action for women. Rather, *The End of Men* catalogues the vast array of changes that have already taken place, not at the behest of any particular ideology, but rather as the result of economic necessity and circumstantial change. Although these changes were enabled by the achievements of feminism, the women Rosin interviews are pragmatic and level-headed, accepting their new prominence as a matter of fact rather than a triumphant achievement. Indeed, the behavioral changes Rosin does prescribe are primarily directed towards men: the world has changed, ineluctably, and she urges men to accept their roles as equal, even interchangeable, partners with women—a reality which has already arrived.

Rosin's book stands in stark contrast to ***Don't Say I Do! Why Women Should Stay Single*** by **Orna Gadish** (New Horizon Press; $14.95), a book as boldly prescriptive as its title indicates. If Rosin views the men she portrays with a certain sympathy, albeit tempered by frustration, Gadish simply wants nothing to do with them—and counsels other women to adopt the same attitudes. Despite its timely, eye-catching title—as Gadish repeats ad nauseam throughout the book, marriage is at an all-time low in the U.S., and singledom is becoming increasingly mainstream—the book is something of a screed, supported by erratic research. Gadish cites such dubious sources as MSN Money and WebMD with distressing regularity, often quoting whole blocs of such articles. The book offers up a heavy dose of conventional wisdom with regard to men and women ("men are more physical, so [women] have to work hard to get men to feel emotions as well"), combined with a near-manically cheerful attitude towards single living ("women who choose a single lifestyle can experience all the benefits of a well-lived and authentic life while remaining genuine and true to themselves"). Ultimately, the text makes a staggering array of broad generalizations about the fate of women as a whole; Gadish's attempt to counterbalance these with the use of anecdotes from anonymous women falls flat, as the

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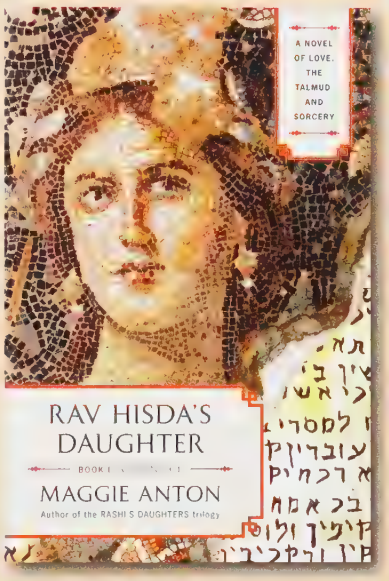

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—Blu Greenberg, author of *On Women and Judaism*

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voices of these women are utterly indistinguishable from the author's. While the book does offer some potentially useful practical advice, particularly to newly single and divorced women, the book's overall repetitiveness renders it a frustrating read. Gadish's ultimate message to women, however, is deeply positive: "There are really no limits on what you can achieve" outside the bounds of marriage, she declares.

Combined, the two books make for a heady cocktail: limitless achievement, both potential and actual, seem to await the female reader today, in contrast to her male counterparts. Although this year may have seen a rise in misogynist commentary, and even legislation, Gadish and Rosin affirm that it's a reactionary flash in the pan in a changed world—one in which women are freer, and more ascendant, than ever before.

TALIA LAVIN *is a recent college graduate spending her Fulbright scholarship year in Ukraine, where she is studying the literary history of the region.*

Being for Myself

Sheila, the narrator of **Sheila Heti**'s provocative "novel from life," ***How Should a Person Be?*** (Henry Holt, $25.00), has been commissioned by a feminist theater company in Toronto to write a play. The theater assures her that while the play need not be feminist, it does have to be about women. Telling herself that she "could just as easily lead the people out of bondage" with commissioned words as with words that come directly from herself, Sheila, who constantly compares herself to Moses while having an affair with a man named "Israel," accepts the job. She admits, though, to knowing nothing about women and being deeply confused both about how or what to write and about how to live: "I felt like I was the tin man, the lion, and the scarecrow in one: I could not feel my heart, I had no courage, I could not use my brain."

How Should a Person Be? is the record of Sheila's struggle to find heart, courage, and brain—to write the play and live her life. It also is that play, a compelling five-act drama constructed from emails, recorded conversations, anecdotes, dreams, and parables. Utterly contemporary, wickedly clever, and profoundly irreverent, *How Should a Person Be?* is also surprisingly religious and deeply feminist. Sheila, who begins as a neurotic lost soul, ends on a note of transcendence as she gives up grandiosity, learns to value her friendship with another woman, and embraces being herself: "no less ugly than the rest."

Critics have marveled at the "from life" aspect of *How Should a Person Be?* Heti has indeed drawn freely on her own experiences to create the "Sheila" of her novel, using actual emails and letters to develop her tale. The technique is an aspect of the novel's superficial appeal; but this surface glitter is valuable only insofar as it reveals the depths of thought and feeling that infuse the book. Far more original and interesting is the use of Old Testament narrative and Jewish story-telling techniques to flesh out Sheila's ambitions and achievements. And though Heti doesn't tell it, the Hasidic story of Reb Zusya—who spent his whole life trying to be Moses, and then was asked by God in heaven why he wasn't Zusya—seems to inform the entire novel.

For Sheila, largely through her friendship with the emotionally honest and outspoken visual artist Margaux, discovers how to be herself, neither a "man on a mountaintop" nor "another man who wants to teach me something." "You are only given one" she finally sees. "You have an apple. Put a fence around it. Once you have put a fence around everything you value, then you have the total circle of your heart." In quietly liberating herself from all her false idols—sex, fame, even art—Sheila also—as she had hoped—succeeds in leading her readers out of their own forms of bondage as well.

JOYCE ZONANA *teaches writing and literature at Borough of Manhattan Community College. She is the author of* Dream Homes: From Cairo to Katrina, an Exile's Journey, *and is currently at work on a translation of a novel by Henri Bosco.*

Cultural Comfort Food

When I am away from Israel, the local foods are among the things I miss most: spicy ground *za'atar*, fresh olive oil, crispy-soft hot pita. And in a delightful memoir by **Abbie Rosner**, ***Breaking Bread in Galilee: A Culinary Journey into the Promised Land*** (Hilayon Press, $25), I have found a new way to whet my appetite. Part cultural history, part anthropology, part food writing, *Breaking Bread in Galilee* explores the food of the Bedouin north through the memoir of Rosner's friendships with her Arab neighbors.

A resident of northern Israel for several decades, the American-born Rosner found herself captivated by the ancient

So, what are YOU reading now?

Now it's your turn. If there's a terrific book you're enjoying, and think other Lilith readers might like it too, let us know. Your fave can be just-published or decades old, and it has to be in English, though translations are fine. Send us the pertinent info—title, author, publisher, and say what's Jewish or feminist about the book, in up to 200 words. We'll consider reviewing the books you tell us about.

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foodways of the Bedouins in the Galilee: their systems of gathering wild vegetation, their methods of milling grain, their traditional recipes. "I approached men and women from different cultures with courtesy and a sincere interest in learning about their culinary traditions. In return, gatherers, farmers and cooks of every ethnic background graciously shared their knowledge and invited me into their homes and hearts."

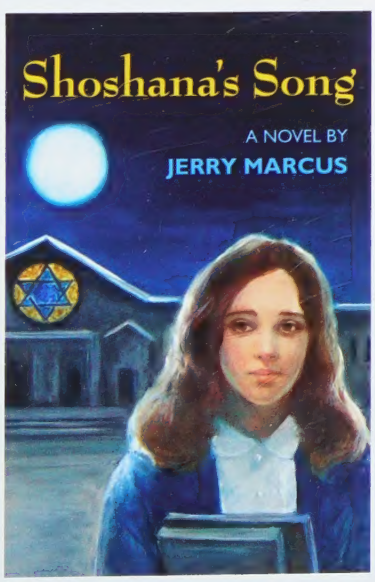
Each of her memoir's short chapters charmingly tells the story of a particular foodstuff, introducing the farmers and laborers who opened their lives to Rosner's culinary inquiry. Rosner documents the old-time ways that are disappearing with industrialization, the *taboun* ovens and foraged spiky greens. One captivating scene portrays a small mechanical mill in a village courtyard to which farmers brought small quantities of wheat. "The rough wooden thresher with its tall hopper looked like it was straight out of an old-time farm museum.... The old man put his hand into the stream of chaff and examined it, anxious not to lose any precious grain." Rosner intersperses her accounts of current practices with detailed discussions of agriculture, society, and Israeli history, providing color and background for her soothing vignettes.

Rosner is a true food writer, and she describes the produce she encounters with lyrical flair. "In the summer, there are sacks of green almonds, their fuzzy shells pliable enough to crack open between your teeth in order to reach the sweet, bleached kernel inside." Her descriptions of recipes and cooking procedures made me want to follow her into the kitchen. Yet not only do we learn about the foods that she eats—wild asparagus and roasted green wheat and mandrakes—but we see the true warmth in the relationships that she has forged. From the mothers who furtively take off their headscarves in the kitchen, comparing their graying hair, to the elderly teacher who kindly instructs her in Arabic, the neighbors Rosner meets give her hope for Jewish and Arab coexistence in the North. A Western reader might be surprised to read of the porous borders between Arab and Jewish communities in Israel, and it is a pleasure to hear a note of optimism in her account.

The Bedouins' ancient foodways are disappearing like their taboun ovens and foraged greens.

If one note rings a bit contrived in this book, it is the Biblical epigraphs that begin many chapters; they seemed a superfluous tool for connecting Jewish tradition to the agriculture of the ancient land. But that is a minor quibble in an otherwise superb book. *Breaking Bread in Galilee* will appeal to those interested in Israeli culture, in traditional food production, or in delicious produce.

SARA N. S. MEIROWITZ *is a writer, teacher, and vegetarian soup chef, as well as a rabbinical student at Hebrew College in Boston.*



When Orthodox Jewish teen Shoshana Rosen rejects her father's demand for an arranged marriage, she feels compelled to leave New York for Chicago and seek intellectual freedom and a career. Joined on the journey by her Chicago roommate, Kate Shannon, an Irish Catholic, they search for professional fulfillment balanced with an intense desire to keep their respective faiths and traditions. Jerry Marcus portrays Shoshana's life journey and difficult choices with charm, humor, and dignity—all contributing to her spiritual growth, and the power of the story.

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HAPPENING

"Small Dances About Big Ideas"

Liz Lerman

When atrocity occurs, what separates the bystanders from the upstanders? Commissioned by Harvard Law School's Martha Minow for the 60th anniversary of the Nuremberg trials, Liz Lerman's "Small Dances About Big Ideas" uses movement, spoken word and documentary soundscape to examine the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust and more recent atrocities in places like Bosnia and Rwanda. Related educational programs are supported by the Covenant Foundation, the Maxine Greene Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. A short film about the project featuring Minow and Lerman has been released by Covenant. *http://danceexchange.org/projects/small-dances-about-big-ideas*

PHOTO: TASO PAPADAKIS

Julie Lockhart and Brad Culver in "Cave"

Training for *Male* Mikveh Guides

People are using mikveh today in traditional and new ways—for healing and to mark a variety of transitions. To facilitate the increased use of mikveh by men, Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh in Newton, Massachusetts is looking for men for a male-only training to take place in 2013. Successful mikveh guides, they say, are able to display compassion and empathy, adapt to a variety of situations in "real time" and maintain a strong sense of boundaries. *mayyimhayyim.org/Home*

Cave... A Dance for Lilith

As the first woman—she came on the scene before Eve—and as the (eminently reclaimable) demon figure of Jewish folklore, Lilith has inspired the creation of a dance theater extravaganza. The Theatre Dybbuk company specializes in "provocative theatrical presentations based on Jewish myths, folklore and history." Written and directed by Aaron Henne with choreography by Kate Hutter, this non-stop spoken word and dance piece debuted in Los Angeles in November as a co-production with LA Contemporary Dance Company and is available to travel. *theatredybbuk.org*

Words Like Sapphires

It's the centennial of the Hebraic collection at the Library of Congress in Washington (who knew?), and this beautifully named new exhibition is part of the celebration. Among the close to 200,000 works in Hebrew and related languages are illuminated wedding contracts, a prayerbook for the "Daughters of Israel," Tamar Messer's *Shir ha-Shirim*, several Esther scrolls, a National Council of Jewish Women guide to citizenship, Yiddish sheet music, and a Lynne Avadenka artistic rendering of the only medieval Hebrew poem attributed to a woman. On site through March 16 or online at *http://myloc.gov/exhibitions/words-like-sapphires/pages/default.aspx*. The Hebraic Section of the Library's African and Middle Eastern Division is one of the world's foremost centers for the study of Hebrew and Yiddish materials. *loc.gov/rr/amed/hs/hshome.html*

The Feminine Mystique at 50

Betty Friedan's 1963 groundbreaking text critiqued the undefined social expectations keeping American women in the home. An exhibition at Parsons, The New School for Design in New York will feature student artwork in reaction to Friedan's thesis. And a symposium will explore it all in lively conversation. February 21–March 6, *thefemininemystique50.wordpress.com*.

Abusive Relationships

Domestic violence happens to one in four Jewish women—but sadly often remains a well-kept family secret. New support groups supported by local Jewish organizations are forming in San Francisco and the East Bay for women coping with abusive or controlling relationships, past or present. Call 866-742-5667] toll-free for help. *jewishhealingcenter.org*

Toiling in a Jewish Workplace

The environment, the culture, and the policies of these workplaces are the themes of the November issue of the journal Sh'ma. Felicia Sol writes about life as a single mother and rabbi; Phoebe Taubman and Ariela Migdal discuss parental leave policies; and Shifra Bronznick and Joanna Samuels analyze some of the Jewish community's strides on behalf of women. Additional essays ask: Are the values in our mission statements aligned with our human resource policies? Do leadership models lead to burnout and women stepping off the professional ladder? *shmadigital.com/shma/201211*

Who Welcomes LGBT Jews?

It should come as no surprise that LGBT Jews are less involved in the Jewish community than their heterosexual counterparts, and this is often because they are unsure of where they will be welcome. A new survey, The Jewish Organization Equality Index, is a first-of-its-kind effort to rate U.S. Jewish non-profit organizations on their policies and programs as related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees and constituents. *hrc.org/joei*

Finding Home # 51 Namaz by Siona Benjamin.

Women Call for Peace

An array of women artists "denounce violent aggression and advocate global peace through nonviolent conflict resolution." Their messages reflect religious belief, race, and personal encounters with violence. Artists include Siona Benjamin, Judy Chicago, Linda Freeman and Faith Ringgold. You can see the exhibition at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery in Lincoln, Nebraska until January 13, 2013. Then at Texas A&M University March 9 to May 28 and John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York September 15 to December 10. Details at *www.eusa.org/exhibit/WomenCallforPeace/tourschedule*.

Haredi Women Workers

Sexologist Dr. Ruth Westheimer, always interested in the dynamics of family relationships, now turns her focus on computer training programs geared especially for ultra-Orthodox women whose husbands are full time students. She appears in a short documentary, which also features programs to increase the numbers of ultra-Orthodox men in the Israeli army, where they too obtain job skills. These are efforts by the Joint Distribution Committee to lift families out of poverty and lessen their dependence on public assistance. Says Westheimer, "As a Hebrew speaker, I know that the word *avodah* means both *avodat hashem* (worship of God) and *avodat kapaim* (employment). What I discovered now proves that the two can dwell under the same roof." *jdc.org/news/videos/jdc-haredi-employment.html*

Moscow Jewish Museum

This thoroughly modern new museum opened in November, with high tech exhibits spanning medieval shtetls and large cities, exploring the role of Russian Jewry in public life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the role of Jewish soldiers during World War II. Find out what it meant to be a "Soviet Jew'" and how and why so many left the U.S.S.R. If you go, please report back on the inclusion of the Jewish feminist renaissance in their portrait of Jewish life today. *mievr.ru/?lang=ENG*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

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Women Dance for a Change

Now: *dance* as mode of social protest and transformation. "Custom-choreographed flash mobs will vividly protest the disappearance of women from the public space simply by reappearing there with energy, impact and joy." This according to Miri Shalem and Susan Reimer-Torn, directors of an international organization producing flash dances on demand in response to important women's rights' issues. Here 250 women in the public square of the Israeli town of Beit Shemesh peacefully perform a protest dance to the accompaniment of Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now." Try this in your own town! *womendanceforachange.org*.

PHOTO: YISSACHAR RUAS

HEBREW NAMES *or*, DREAMING OF VARDIT

by VICKI BOYKIS

A LOT OF PEOPLE I KNOW WERE born with Hebrew names. On every organized trip to Israel I've been on, rollcall has been full of Hannahs and Esthers. Maybe an Avi or two. But because I was born in the extremely anti-Semitic Soviet Union and my parents didn't want me to catch an asskicking every now and again, not to mention that my dad isn't Jewish, they decided on a non-Hebrew name for me, Victoria. You can see that drama unfold here.

When I was 17 and went on a March of the Living trip to Poland and Israel, for the first time in my life I really started feeling Jewish. I asked a bunch of questions of the kids on my trip who had grown up in Jewish homes. The person on the trip I pestered the most, a woman with grandchildren a little younger than me, understood the Russian kids on the trip all too well. Susan knew we were brought up to sneer at events with religious overtones, to eat pork, and to be ignorant of 90% of Jewish traditions.

It wasn't our fault, or our parents' fault. It's just what Russian Jews did to survive the Soviet Union. With patience, Susan explained to me, when I expressed my unwillingness to visit a synagogue for services in Poland, what Shabbat was and why we celebrated it. She showed me how to wash my hands before a meal when I shied away in terror from a ritual all the other kids were performing with knowledge. And she answered my constant questions about the subject I was most interested in, Hebrew.

"So, you say 'ha' before every word in Hebrew?" I asked her.

"No, it's like the word 'the.'"

"So, how do you say, 'I love Israel?'" "Well, it depends on if it's masculine or feminine. I would say, '*Ani, Shoshana, ohevet et Israel.*'" I asked her why she pointed to herself as Shoshana. "It's my Hebrew name," she said.

My curiosity about Hebrew names was piqued. It also helped that there were at least 10 Russian kids on our bus who were also Hebrew name-less. They went by names like Svetlana, Irina, Igor. Susan and our Russian *shaliach* decided it would be a great opportunity to give us all Hebrew names in Israel, seeing how attached we were getting to being Jewish. That was the good part.

THE BAD PART WAS THAT none of us really knew Hebrew at a level well enough to understand the names we were receiving. I thumbed through the Hebrew name book (in Hebrew, of course) with the shaliach. "You know that receiving a new name changes the direction of your life," he said casually. He would know. He'd made aliyah when he was 16 and changed his Russian name to a Hebrew one a year later. I looked at the foreign letters with trepidation. What if I messed up and chose the wrong one? Would that mean I would be banished to the West Bank or, worse, Dimona?

"What's the name that's closest to Victoria or Victory in Hebrew?" I asked him.

"Probably Nitzana. But you don't want that name. It doesn't sound nice." And of course, it didn't to me. I listened to whatever he told me.

He kept thumbing, no doubt past many desirable choices like Raheli or Goldameirit. "Vered," he said. "It's close-sounding to your name. What do you think about that?"

I thought it sounded pretty awesome. I didn't realize that it had the same connotations in Hebrew as Ethel. No offense to anyone named Vered. It's not like you could have chosen your own name. Unlike some people.

I thought my name sounded pretty awesome. I didn't realize it had the same connotations as Ethel. No offense.

"It sounds pretty cool! What does it mean?"

"Rose."

I thought this over. I had none of the characteristics girls with flower names were supposed to have. I didn't know the difference between rouge and foundation. And I wasn't gentle, understanding, and ladylike. I was definitely not a Vered.

"I'll take it," I said, and was proclaimed Vered the next day on a hill overlooking the Kinneret. It was all very nationalistic. I might have cried. But about a year after I got the name, I started Hebrew classes at my university. And then I got jealous. Some people were Shulamit, or Anat, or Keren. I cursed myself. Why couldn't I have even chosen Vardit? That would sound at least a little bit cooler. But no, from that day forward, I was Vered.

It got so bad that, when I did an internship at Bank HaPoalim in Israel and I was being introduced to my coworkers, I said, "*Shmi Vered*," and they said, "*Shmech* WHAT?" And I said, "Shmaybe not." After that, I was Vicki the whole summer. I can't even use my Hebrew name in the Land of Israel. The ultimate Zionist failure. If there are any Vereds out there who are proud of our name, please come forward. Otherwise I will be forever dreaming of being Orly. Or Yael. ■

Vicki Boykis was born Jewish in Russia and raised guilty in America. She works in Big Data, is doing her MBA, and in the other three spare minutes is working on her first novel. She lives with her husband in Philadelphia-ish. She blogs at blog.vickiboykis.com.

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